

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JULY 1978

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PRINTOUT FOR MURDER

A New MIKE SHAYNE

Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

DEATH IN BROOKLYN

A NYPD Novelet

by Jerry Jacobson

THE BLUE TRAIL

by MIKE TAYLOR



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JULY, 1978
VOL. 42, NO. 7

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

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by BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne is hired by an electronics millionaire to discover who murdered his daughter, in the university library. The killing is two years old But the killer is still very much alive 2 to 43

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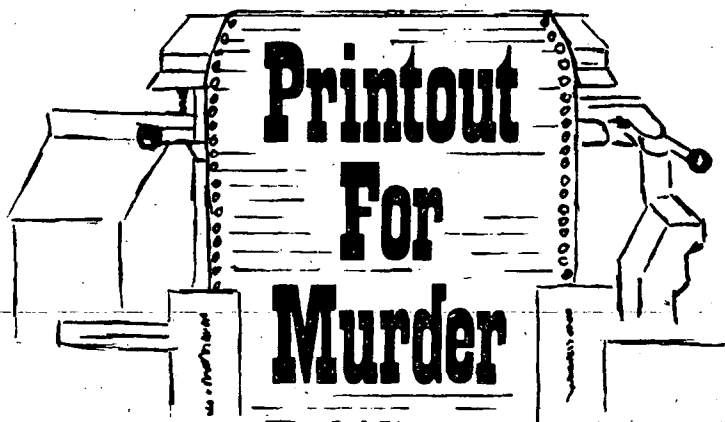
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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



by BRETT HALLIDAY

His daughter's murder was two years old when electronics millionaire Harry Rockman hired Mike Shayne to solve her murder. It took the Miami redhead little time to learn that her killer was still alive and active — and ready to shoot.

HARRY K. ROCKMAN TWISTED uneasily in Shayne's comfortable chair. His suit was grey, expensive, correct for New England, not for Miami in April. Shayne eyed him attentively. Nothing could be heard but the soft clacking of Lucy Hamilton's typewriter from the outer office.

Angry red lines straddled Mr. Rockman's big hawk nose. A dark intelligence stirred in his eyes, and they moved with a black

hunger as if circling prey. Beads of sweat spattered his brow.

"Mr. Shayne, it's worth twenty-five thousand to me. Five now — twenty later."

"Why?"

"You know what an iceberg is, right?"

A vague unrest troubled Shayne as he waited. "Yes."

Harry Rockman eased a thin black checkbook from an inner pocket. "By the way, I'm not

referring to any amount of money. Not money, at all. Can you imagine how much is hidden, Mr. Shayne! *Can you?*"

"Of what?"

"The iceberg. There's an immense bulk which does not meet the eye. At the time of her murder" — Harry Rockman winced at the word — "I had no reason to think, Pen — that's my pet name for my daughter — knew anything about our latest electronic development. She was never interested in electronics. Stuck day in and day out to her Medieval Studies."

The tally redhead swung around in his chair. "Mr. Rockman, you haven't explained one thing. I know it must be painful to you. But after all, two years is two years."

Harry Rockman rocked forward in his chair. "The cops didn't get anywhere. Do you know what Captain Sturgis' explanation was? He thought it might have been a kook. *Might* have been! *Imagine!*"

"Last week a certain fact hit me for real. The killer ... " A black shadow churned in Rockman's eyes. "I think the killer is still on campus. First I thought of hiring somebody from Boston. But then, I found out about you from my lawyer, Ben Altman. You know the Miami scene. I have the sneaking suspicion whoever killed my daughter ... "

A curious embarrassment tugged at Shayne's subconscious.

"You see" — an angry red line

shot across Rockman's forehead — "I can't forget Pen's death. Look, Mr. Shayne, I still fight nightmares every night of my life."

Shayne slowly tweaked his left earlobe. "Yesterday, when you phoned, I wanted to say no. I checked you out. You check out okay. That's why I agreed to see you. What do you want? Something is bothering you, Mr. Rockman. And you're beginning to bother me. What is it you want — revenge?"

Mr. Rockman jerked up straight in Shayne's chair. "Revenge? Would revenge bring back Pen, Mr. Shayne? *Would it?* I'll pay you twenty-five. You find her killer. That's all I want."

Shayne stared into Harry Rockman's dark eyes, but Rockman's gaze did not waver. Whatever else Rockman might be, he was not shift.

"Okay, okay." Mike Shayne nodded. "I remember the case. Not the details. It made all the papers. Excuse me for being blunt. 'Coed found murdered in stacks.' The University was hot for months. But, Mr. Rockman, it's cold now — two years cold. Why did you wait so long?"

Instead of an answer, Harry Rockman uttered an angry grunt. He coughed and then battled himself into an awkward composure. It took Shayne the better part of an hour to pry any useful information out of the man.

That night, the detective sat

with Lucy in the Golden Cock on Biscayne. He didn't feel hungry. He didn't know what he felt. He ran through the essential parts with Lucy.

She swept back her rich brown hair and gave him a look of some concern. "It doesn't make sense to me, Michael. Not one smidgen."

"I thought a smidgen was a wild duck."

"Michael, that's awful. From what you've told me, there's more to Mr. Rockman than meets the eye."

Shayne nodded as he cut a succulent hunk of T-bone. "He's for real, though. Half tough, half soft. I can't help liking the guy. I have his check for five. And now, since we're spending most of it here, I'm sure as hell committed to finding Allison Rockman's killer. Hey, Angel, you're not eating?"

"I'm not hungry. And I don't follow all Rockman's confidential garbage. What did Rockman call it — electronic concentrator?"

"He went way over my head. But four years ago, his firm came up with a way of putting a computer within reach of the Great American Family. Linking up huge reservoirs of knowledge and information with tiny units. At the center of these machines, there's a gizmo — Rockman called them microchips.

"They're not new. What Rockman's firm is *doing* with them is new. A final stage of miniaturiza-

tion. Well, to make a long story short, Syncom out in Sunnyvale came out with this unit two years ago in June. Only two quick months after Pen's death.

"Rockman was too broken up at the time to think much about it. Now, he finds it too much of a coincidence. Not only that, looking through Pen's stuff recently, he found some prototype printouts of a damaging nature. He got curious. That's when he thought of hiring me."

Lucy's smile was two edged. She said, "Michael, I don't like it."

"What don't you like, Angel? What's wrong with that wine? You're not touching your steak. I thought you liked tossed salad? Even the French bread had your name on it."

"I have a feeling, Michael — a bad hunch. But let's forget it. What about Rockman's company? I suppose he's making money."

"Faster than the mint. I had Tim check Dun and Bradstreet. Rockman Enterprises sits on top of the heap. But, as Rockman said, he's in an extremely volatile, risky business. One year you're up, next year you're down. Not Rockman, though. He's been lucky. For the past decade, his firm has pulled in a nice steady profit."

"Then why is he so mad at Syncom?"

"I don't know, Angel."

"But, Michael, it's all too cold blooded. Would somebody go and

Will Rockman's daughter simply to get his hands on this new development? Even if she had it? Maybe it makes sense to you. But frankly, I'm mystified."

Shayne finished his steak. He half smiled.

"At first, Rockman didn't think anyone would, either. But he had to change his mind. There was another killing. In an incident at Rockman's plant outside Boston, a guard was shot — killed. After that, Rockman came to realize he had something valuable to guard."

A call to the city room uncovered Tim Rourke at his desk. "Yeah, Mike, I remember Allison Rockman. A good looking chick. Hair like Jason's Golden Fleece. A face rivalling Helen of Troy's. All good things going for her. Then she ups and gets herself shot down in the stacks at the U."

"You sound as if you knew her personally."

"Not me, Mike. I saw her once at the Golden Cock. Had a suitable escort. A Harvard type if I ever saw one. So what's your interest?"

"I took on the case for her father, Rockman. Seems he got my name from his lawyer."

"Big money, Mike. Big!"

"Yeah — so thanks. What was she doing in the stacks?"

"Seems she was researching her thesis for a Chaucerian problem of some kind or other. Her field was the Medieval

Period. Her Prof was old Waller-Smith, himself. World famous."

"Never heard of him."

"Doesn't surprise me, Mike. Outside of his field, not many have. What can I do for you?"

"How about digging up all the things Will and his boys uncovered? Like the gun, the bullet, any other morbid details."

"Okay, Mike. Give me half an hour. I'll call back."

II

MIKE SHAYNE LOWERED himself into his favorite chair and stared at his favorite wall. The wall told him nothing. He remembered the anguish in Rockman's dark eyes. But those same dark eyes held more than pain. Shayne experienced a troublesome doubt. What was that dark tumbling shape hidden inside Rockman's eyes? Was it Pen's killer? Or was it something else?

He caught a sudden vision of Tim Rourke's bony fingers ferreting swiftly through clippings in the *Miami News*' morgue. He could almost see vivid lights pop out in Tim's eyes. And Tim's bony shoulders moved with an almost imperceptible chuckle.

Was Rockman out for revenge? Or was it really revenge? What was it? Why did Rockman expect Shayne to solve a puzzle the combined Miami Police under Will Gentry's skillful guidance could not do?

Tim rang back. "I got it, Mike— all of it. Allison was shot with a twenty-five — small caliber for a murder. A woman's gun, but the caliber proves nothing. They found the bullet but not the gun. She was shot about four in the afternoon. Nobody heard the shot. Some student found her about six. But nobody is quite sure of that, either."

"Why not?"

"Ever work in a library, Mike? No? Well, they do things different. They're geared for research — not for murder."

"Any suspects?"

"One. The good-looking Harvard type, Chris Nathan. They cleared him almost instantly. Like I said, they never found the gun. They did run the bullet through ballistics."

"And?"

"Negative."

"Yeah, figures."

"Fingerprints negative, too."

Only those of the students who were assigned cubicles in the same area as Allison Rockman. I wonder why Rockman called her Pen?"

"Got me."

"Mike, listen, I think you're in for a handsome headache. Len Sturgis dug up nothing. The case is two years dead. But then again I don't pay your cognac bills. Where are you starting, Mike?"

"At the beginning — at the library where she got shot. Right

there in the stacks. Though, as a matter of fact, I may find it rough to get in."

"Nothing easier, just flash your I.D. Tell them you're working for the *Miami News*. If you get any thing, you'll fill me in, right?"

After much dialling Shayne finally reached Miss Janet Love, an assistant librarian. She sounded hesitant but finally agreed to meet him at four the following day. He thanked her and hung up.

To Shayne, being among the stacks was not his idea of high and easy living. He had never felt more cramped in his life. He was too tall, too wide, too damn big to go crawling through those booklined aisles.

The ceiling kept crowding down. The floor rose up. He wanted out, but he had to go through with it. Miss Love turned after a few moments and gave him a smile of sympathy.

She didn't look like an assistant librarian. Shayne followed her trim little body until they came to the cubicle where Allison Rockman had been shot. Shayne noted it was numbered 13C. They were then on the seventh level of the stacks, and it seemed to Shayne they must be at the very heart of the library.

He watched Miss Love flick a red-painted fingernail along a white card poking out of a green metal slot. Somebody had typed Allison's name on it — probably

Allison Rockman herself.

"Card still here, I see," Janet said.

"Where was her body?"

"In there." Janet pointed. "Miss Rockman stored many of her own books in those shelves. Plus, of course, her own notebooks. Allison had her own filing system. And, rather strangely I think, a large collection of computer printouts. Naturally, during the four years she was here, she used much of our own collection for backup.

"Since her death — well, all that has been removed. I don't know why we haven't reassigned her cubicle. But we haven't. Once I heard a strange rumor. Something about one of her professors. I don't know what it was. But certainly by this time we should have given it to another student. After all, Mr. Shayne, we really are very cramped for space."

Mike Shayne pushed into the narrow cubicle and stared slowly around. There was not much to look at. There was one large desk-like shelf. It was metal and painted green.

Six rows of smaller shelves hung over the desk. Shayne noted it would have been difficult for a short person to reach to the top one. There was a brown reading lamp with a cracked shade. Somebody had knifed the initials G. K. into the surface of the desk. That was all.

The little closet had been dusted

and polished recently, and the green metal gleamed with a cold lifeless look. It was all grimly reminiscent of something ice-cold and calculating. Shayne felt it to be more of a torture cell in some medieval prison than a study room.

"I'm sorry," he said and wanted to drag out one of his cigarets but knew he couldn't, "Miss Love, I don't like it."

For a second, Janet's soft blue eyes caught his grey ones. Her mouth smiled without mirth. "I can understand that, Mr. Shayne. Allison was killed here. She was sitting in that chair, slumped over her Chaucer."

"I didn't quite mean it that way, Miss Love. Supposedly, I'm used to murder. I meant this cubicle itself. It gives me the creeps." Mike waited until Janet Love smoothed her grey skirt and stepped back. "And that's all, Miss Love? Who had admittance to the library?"

"All the faculty, of course. Administration, too. Though they never use it. And all the students. They have free access. The cubicles are assigned to students doing Masters or Ph.D. research. On occasion, too, certain scholars."

"Such as?"

"Oh, say, somebody visiting from England, or Europe. Or simply from some other University in this country. It doesn't much matter. But we haven't had one now for a couple of years. Mainly,

they go to New York, or Washington, or California."

"Why, California?"

"The Huntington Library in L.A. is world renowned." Janet Love relaxed a notch as the red-head smiled. "I do hope I have been of some help to you, Mr. Shayne. Is there anything else?"

For the first time, Shayne really caught the full impact of her frail blonde beauty. A cluster of freckles spoiled the grace of her nose. Her teeth sat in an uneven, tomboyish line. Even her left ear stuck out weirdly.

But Janet Love carried herself with a delicate warmth. Shayne found the fragile set of her hips and the gentle thrust of her light green sweater far more inviting than the flagrant tease of most Miami Beach bunnies.

"Thanks, Miss Love. You've been a big help. For one thing, I could never have found this cubicle by myself. Why do you suppose there was nobody near Miss Rockman on the thirteenth of April two years ago?"

Miss Love trembled slightly. "I don't know. But it is true there wasn't. This level is mostly used by our English group. And they were all over at some sort of do. I guess, from what they say, the Head of the English Department was having one of his semester teas. I don't know why Allison didn't go. Unluckily for her, she didn't."

"Thanks again."

The phone booth outside the library was no different from phone booths the country over. It had dark green panels, glass windows, brushed aluminum columns. Mike Shayne shoved himself in and dialed Tim's number. He wanted the lowdown on Professor Anthony Foster, the Head of the English Department.

From nowhere a sudden flash of light caught his eyes and caused the skin to crawl on the back of his neck. Without hesitation Mike Shayne hurled himself backwards from the phone booth.

The bullet, which sould have struck him, angled down through thick glass. It kicked out a hole the size of his fist. It then made a jagged tear in the green metal panel. It ended up skittering fiendishly across the concrete sidewalk.

Shayne hurried for cover. He had heard no sound of a shot. Students stared at him curiously. Nothing suspicious moved along the upper floors of the library, but there was one open window on the tenth floor.

It took Mike Shayne a few seconds to make up his mind about collecting his hat and knocking the dust off it. Obviously somebody did not want him to reopen the Allison Rockman case. Just as obviously somebody wanted him dead.

Shayne felt anger leap inside him. If he had not moved fast, the bullet would have penetrated his

left collarbone and exited at his right hip.

The detective smiled the thin smile of combat. He had a date to keep. And that date was with Miss Love. She was the one person who knew he was coming to visit the library on that particular date, at that particular time.

III

IT TOOK SHAYNE a long, hard search, but he finally found the spent and badly misshapen bullet. It lay next to the curb approximately thirty feet from the phone booth. He picked it up and stuffed it into his pocket. He drove a little more thoughtfully than usual back northeast on Ponce de Leon and Le Jeun to his office on Flagler Street.

When he entered, Lucy looked up but said nothing. Shayne was content to brush his lips across her sweet smelling hair and dive into his own back office, where he sank into the chair behind his desk. He dropped the bullet in front of him and studied it.

Then he phoned Janet Love.

"Yes, Mr. Shayne. I thought you might call."

The undertone in Janet's voice puzzled him. Was it fear, relief — or something else? "What made you think that?"

She laughed a low laugh. "I know a little bird. Are you all right?"

"I'm okay. But I don't like your

little bird. When can I speak to you in private?"

"How about tomorrow? I'm off. My place, beside the pool. I'll provide the shrimp dip and gin. Bring your own swim trunks."

She gave him the address of an apartment complex in Coral Gables and Shayne made a note of it. He hesitated before dialing Will Gentry's number. What he wanted most of all was to keep the story out of the newspapers, plus the fact that he had not spoken to Will in some time.

"Yes, Mike, what is it now? Let me guess. You've got yourself in a jam. You want me to come over and bail you out."

"Not that, Will. Not yet anyway. I'm sitting here looking at a little spent bullet. Could you run it through ballistics and do an I.D. on it for me?"

Shayne caught a slight change in Gentry's breathing, but the chief didn't choose to make an issue of it. "Sure, Mike, drop it by. Why not first thing in the morning? I haven't seen you in so long I was beginning to wonder what had happened to you."

"I'm still here."

"Glad to hear it, Mike. Drop around."

Mike swung away from his phone and called to Lucy. "Angel, you still want a job?"

"Sure."

"Okay, get in here, and I'll give you a few things to run down."

"Like...?"

"Get in here."

Lucy sauntered in and plopped in the visitor's chair. Her eyes jumped when she saw the bullet. She leaned forward and tapped it with a long thin finger. "Michael, why the exhibit? Does this have something to do with the Rockman case?"

Quickly he told her.

For perhaps the tenth time in his life, he saw Lucy go pale. It took her a full minute to regain control and then she propped herself up in the visitor's chair and looked at him expectantly. Her notebook rested firmly on her knees.

"One, I want you to find out the names of anybody at the university who was connected with Allison Rockman. I don't care how remotely. Friends, faculty, whatever."

"Yes, sir."

"And" — Mike Shayne stabbed out his cigaret — "two, I want you to get their full credentials. Where they came from. How long they were at the U. Everything about them."

"Michael, you want me to go and live there?"

"No, do it by phone. And, three" — the redhead pointed a finger at her — "I don't want you to get hurt. Okay, when you get it, type the list. Give it to me later."

"Okay, Michael."

The next morning, with the sun

high and hot over Miami, Shayne dropped his bullet off with Will Gentry. He knew what it looked like. He wanted to be sure. Will, glaring at him over a stinking cigar, promised he would have a full report that afternoon.

"Used to be," Will said, "it would take me a week. Not any more. We have ways and means now, Mike. Even here in this city, we're getting modernized. Drop over, Mike, I'll show you around our new facilities sometime."

"Thanks. But not now, Will. I've got a hot one."

"Sure, sure! Keep it to yourself, Mike. Maybe that way the next time I'm looking at you will be on a slab. At county expense."

The detective climbed into his Buick and drove over to the Golden Cock on Biscayne. He was following his nose more than anything else. Tim had mentioned the Golden Cock. Shayne knew it was far too early to eat. The restaurant wasn't even open yet.

The rehead had something else in mind. He wanted to speak to Jeff Keyes, the lanky forty-year-old car attendant, who seemed to have nothing better to do in life than park cars. Jeff would be out there in the morning sun, even if there were no cars to park.

Shayne swung around a corner, braked and pulled into the big lot. Jeff was there with his brush broom and his pushcart tidying up beneath four tall palms. Ten white

garbage cans stood behind him.

"Shayne — long time no see!" Jeff cracked a wry smile and ran his dirty fingers through his grey hair. "What brings you out so early? Don't tell me you got religion?"

Shayne smiled and fingered his own stubbled chin. He admired Keyes. Keyes was neither young, nor old. His face was reminiscent of a weathered string bean. It mystified Shayne how Keyes could spend such an inordinate amount of time out in the sun and air and still show up looking so pale.

Keyes tuggead at a loose pair of denim slacks, two sizes too large. His white shirt was dirty, and Keyes had turned the sleeves up so white rolls popped over the sharp points of his elbows.

"You remember a lot, Jeff. Almost as much as Bill inside." Shayne jabbed his thumb towards the restaurant. "I want to test your memory. What do you remember about two years ago?"

"You gotta be kidding."

Keyes made a half-hearted push with his broom and then bent over and picked up a matchbook with a red and black design on it. "Shayne, I always figured you smarter than that. Two years?"

"Keyes, you can't fool me. *If* the doll was good looking enough — *if* she had the right kind of blonde hair, done precisely the right way, you'd remember, Jeff. Now, wouldn't you?"

"Maybe so. Maybe no. Who?

What's her name?"

"Allison Rockman. She was shot over at the university. Two years ago. Remember her coming here? She was seen."

Keyes chewed the inside of his left cheek and made a sudden snorting sound which lifted his upper lip high over his long yellow teeth. "Strange your asking, Shayne. Strange. Never saw her in my life. I did read about her in the papers though. Too bad."

"Jeff, I told you she was *seen* here. That's a fact. I don't know how often. Sure you couldn't jog your memory for me?"

IV

SHAYNE WATCHED KEYES turn towards the restaurant, then consider Shayne's Buick. After a long hesitation, he made his mind up and leaned on his push broom. He looked thoughtful.

"Yeah, sure. You're right, Shayne. I guess I do remember the kid. Only a young thing. Gold hair. Like a dream ..."

Jeff dropped off into some inner memory and stayed silent for a couple of minutes. Shayne watched his deep-sunk eyes. "Pen, that's her nickname. Leastways, I heard the guy call her that. She was nice — real nice. Gave me a five for no reason at all. All I did was park the dude's car. Looked like one of those smart young lawyers if you get what I

mean. Super smart."

"What kind of a car?"

"Grey Jag — Sedan. Not the type of car you expect to see a student tooling around in. But then..."

"Jeff." Shayne popped a cigaret between his lips. "Allison must have struck you more than a little bit. You remember her almost too well. Why?"

Jeff reached down, fumbled with a discarded newspaper, dropped it into his cart. "Funny thing. Nothing that would do you any good, Shayne. She was such a wideawake, sharp kid. Living every second. Quick, too."

Jeff glanced at Shayne sideways. "Reminded me of what might have been. Back in Akron with my old lady. We used to dream sometimes about a kid. I would have wanted my daughter to be like that. Smart, polished, polite. Not nasty like some of these tramps."

Shayne caught the embarrassed smile, the cautious wink. Somehow through Jeff's vision of her he had caught more of Allison "Pen" Rockman than he would ever have got from her father. Jeff had caught some vital essence and it had stuck.

"Thanks, Jeff. I understand. You saw her only with the one Harvard type then? Never with anybody else?"

"That's it, Shayne. She came here about three times — and I remember those three times. A

spark of the true woman. But always with that cleancut Jack Armstrong. Always very polite. But, no, there was one time when..."

"One time when what?" Shayne placed a friendly hand on Jeff's right shoulder. "One time when what, Jeff?"

"Nothing much. She drove out here one night in March. She did the driving. Very smooth. Early March it was, maybe like a month before she got herself shot. Funny thing. Nothing I could ever testify to. Like I never even seen it for sure. More like a feeling. But I could have sworn that she was being followed.

"Happened this way. She got out of the driver's seat. And I saw a big black sedan pull up across the street. Not very well lit over there. Black tinted glass all around. So I couldn't get a look inside, not even if I'd been closer.

"The sedan held there for only a few seconds, giving Pen and her escort just enough time to get into the joint. Then it took off. Maybe playing Shayne, I made half a stab at getting the license. I got nothing. For all I know it was a Florida license. I'm not even sure of that."

Shayne grinned. "Okay, Jeff, I had a hunch you might start bucking for my job one of these days. But later, Jeff, when you read about her murder. That when you got to thinking? You wondered then about that other car?"

"Yeah."

"Never told anybody?"

"No."

Janet Love, sitting on a Brown and Jordan pale green chaise, came on as far more impressive to look at than Janet Love in the stacks. The blue tone of the pool gave a blue sparkle to her eyes.

She wore a thin pale blue trunk suit which announced to the world in general that she took her swimming seriously. Beads of water pearly seductively off her tan skin as she glanced up with a quick warm smile.

Shayne's quick glance revealed no anxiety on her part, no attempt to camouflage any guilt feelings.

"Welcome, Mr. Shayne. Would you like me to get you something to drink. After all, I did promise you a gin."

"No, thanks. Mind if I smoke?"

"Go right ahead."

Shayne found a light aluminum chair and pulled it up to where he could watch her face and eyes. The green umbrella cut the sun. As far as he could see, her face remained naively expectant and eager. Janet Love certainly did not look as if she were someone connected with a murder.

"Miss Love, I'll be frank. After I left you yesterday. After I left the library ..."

"No, please!" Miss Love grasped the arm of her chaise so tightly her knuckles turned white and hard. "No! I didn't want ..."

"Didn't want, what? Miss Love. expression on her face."

You haven't listened to me yet."

"I was somehow afraid you were going to tell me someone shot at you." Her eyes suddenly clouded. "It was not my fault, Mr. Shayne. Not at all. When he asked me who you were, I told him that ..."

"Miss Love, please. Who?"

"Greg Chancellor. He's ... Well, to be frank. He's my sometimes boy friend. More sometimes than anything else. He shows up for a date when he can't ... It seems when he's feeling in the confessional mood. Maybe I'm his father confessor figure — or mother. I don't know."

"Miss Love, let's get this straight," Shayne said coldly. "You told this Greg Chancellor that I was coming to the library. You told him I was interested in seeing the cubicle where Miss Allison Rockman was murdered?"

"Yes."

Shayne had the sudden feeling he was sitting next to a very complex, very difficult young lady. "I see. Okay, Miss Love, I was shot at. Somebody used a rifle — a sporting rifle — with a silencer — and a scope. They damn near got me. Do you think this Greg Chancellor could have done that?"

Suddenly alert, with a quick twist, Janet Love threw herself upright on the chaise. She swung her legs over the edge. She propped her chin on her knees. She studied Shayne with an inquisitive

It was neither frightened, nor guilty. It showed more stark apprehension than anything else. It was as if she were sitting there, waiting to be slapped in the mouth.

"Sounds strange, I know," she said. "Yet, I don't suspect Greg. He wouldn't do such a thing. *Couldn't*! He doesn't have the guts for it. Yet, I'm sure that anything I told Greg ... he wouldn't pass it on.

"Mr. Shayne, to prove my point, I've asked Greg to come and join us here. He should be along in five minutes. And I think you'll see when you meet him that he couldn't have done it. No, Mr. Shayne, Greg Chancellor is not a killer."

Shayne hunched back a fraction of an inch. "So, if he's not a killer; what is he?"

V

JANET LOVE FLICKED a quick tongue tip along her lower lip. "Greg is ... a perpetual student. He's been here in our Grad School for something like ten years now. He's thirty-fiveish. Each year he sets himself some new project. He has never finished one of them.

His parents left him some money. Then, too, he makes a bit tutoring. I think that's how he met Pen. His one thing is girls. In herds. He likes the action. That's his word for it, not mine. Mr. Shayne, I'm afraid Greg is not

your ideal suspect. Wait and see."

Shayne hunched back even further in the rickety chair and reached inside his jacket for another cigaret. He stopped his movement. Something about the clear air and the clean water in the pool had changed his mind.

"Miss Love, would it be too much trouble if you did get me a drink?"

"No problem. I live right there." She pointed up one flight. "Okay, Mister, what's your poison. Once again, the words are not mine. From some old re-run movie, I guess."

"Brandy and soda."

"Fine."

Shayne watched her move with long lithe strides across the white concrete. Each step added a special seductive bounce to the sway of her hips. All her delicacy seemed to have vanished. She was giving him a signal that she was a woman, and he was a man.

Her hand when she gave him the drink trembled slightly. Her lower lip pouted a fraction. Ice cubes clinked in Shayne's tall glass. It was hot under the umbrella, and Janet Love pulled thirstily at her gin and tonic. No question about it ... Janet Love could be had.

Seven minutes later, Greg Chancellor emerged from an apartment door in the back and walked towards them. Shayne studied him carefully. Greg's hair was the color of bronze filings,

well kept, not too long. His eyes were bluish green.

His face was well made, but deep worry lines troubled the small, precise shape of his mouth. His teeth were good. He wore grey flannel slacks and a blue cotton shirt. His white buck shoes came from some yesteryear. In manner he seemed easygoing, casual.

After plopping a sloppy kiss on Janet's upturned mouth, he swung and faced the detective.

"Mister, I don't know you."

Shayne — Mike Shayne."

"Yeah, Sure, that's it." Greg glanced at Janet. "She told me. Is that why you wanted to see me."

"Mr. Chancellor, let's get something straight. I didn't want to see you. Miss Love thought I'd better. I have a problem. Maybe you can help me solve it. Sun bother you?"

Greg squinted and raised his hand to shield his face. "No, it's not that bright. I'm used to the heat. Earlier, I played squash. You play, Mr. Shayne?"

"No. It's not one of my games."

Greg hooked his foot into a chair and pulled it into a position opposite the redhead. From there, he stared more at Shayne's empty glass than at Shayne. He didn't look at Janet at all.

"Mr. Shayne, I understand you are a private investigator. Something about Pen Rockman. Has her father ... ?"

"How well did you know Miss Rockman?"

"Allison was in love with me."

"You knew her intimately then?"

"You could call it that."

"Greg, cut it out." Janet sipped her gin and tonic and stared at Chancellor over the rim of her glass. "Pen never loved you. She was in love with Chris Nathan."

"Jan, honey, I don't want to hurt your feelings. Wouldn't dream of it. But Pen and I were close. Like this." Greg held up entwined index and middle finger. "For months."

"So what if she did your Russian? And so what if you did her French? So what?"

"What kind of a lousy joke is that?"

"No joke. Mr. Shayne, please! What is it you would really like to ask our Mr. Chancellor. Mr. Chancellor has all the time in the world. Please do not hesitate."

Shayne caught the raw note of anger in Janet's tone and glanced at her quickly. But he was more interested in Greg Chancellor. A thin film of sweat spread slowly over Greg's upper lip. Greg's tension was apparent. Shayne wondered about its cause.

"Okay, Chancellor." Shayne brought his stare fully on Greg. "Somebody tried to drill me yesterday. High powered rifle. Silencer. Any ideas?"

Instead of answering, Greg swung towards Janet and gave her a quick biting smile. "Any chance

of getting one of those. Frankly, honey, I'm thirsty."

Shayne waited patiently while Janet Love strode once again across the white concrete. This time her walk was dainty and demure, and Shayne pondered his previous judgment of her. Maybe she wasn't so pulse-arousing after all.

What, on the other hand, kept her glued to Greg Chancellor? If, indeed, she was glued to him? For a second, Shayne felt he had wandered into another library. He felt stranded among millions of books.

"Here, Greg," Janet spoke softly when she returned. "I put in half a line. Have you and Mr. Shayne reached an understanding?"

Greg took a big gulp of his gin and tonic. "No way! What brings him here in the first place? Pen died two years ago — not yesterday. Why couldn't Mr. Shayne stay down on Twelfth Street. I'm sure he feels more at home there. More his line of work, I should say."

Shayne gritted his teeth and look to bear on Mr. Chancellor. "Flattery, Mr. Chancellor, will get you nowhere. Obviously you didn't fire the shot yesterday. But tell me something — who did? Janet knew about my visit — nobody else. She told you, Mr. Chancellor. I'm sure you told somebody else."

"You're mistaken."

"Who was it?"

Greg Chancellor had been sitting partly under the umbrella. He now moved back until he was sitting fully in the sun. Shayne watched him, expecting some cutting and sarcastic remark. Greg didn't make one.

A bullet whined past Shayne's ear with the violence of a mad hornet. It caught Greg in the throat. At one and the same time, two immense forces tore Greg's body. One sent him into a crouch. The other lifted him and spun him to the edge of the pool. He fell. Blood spurted freely across white concrete. Blood ran red into the blue pool. Greg Chancellor would never speak another word.

Janet screamed.

Shayne hurled himself to his feet and dashed through the inner doors of the apartment complex, out onto the sidewalk. Traffic flowed in orderly patterns. Nobody hurried into the street.

A lady with a white poodle yelled at him, but he didn't listen. He went back to the pool and told Janet to call the police. Shayne then stood studying the apparent angle of the bullet.

Across the street from the apartment complex rose a tall office building. It stood out stark white against the blue sky. Shayne thought it offered a good spot to shoot from.

On the tenth floor, one dark window, now closed, caught Shayne's eye. The shot could have come from there. It would have

been three hundred yards at the least, and the killer had not missed. Who was that good with a rifle? If the killer was supposedly one of Greg's friends, that friendship was over.

VI

WHEN SHAYNE ENTERED the Blue Lamp, the hard beat of rag-time pulsed from a piano bar in the corner. He had trouble finding Tim Rourke. It was too dark. Cigaret smoke drifted so thickly the detective felt he had walked into a room full of cotton gauze.

Tim sat at the end of a long and twisting bar. In that blue light, the reporter's features looked greener than ever. Seeing Shayne, Tim lifted his drink and made a feeble gesture. Shayne moved towards him through a mob of wildly gesticulating men and women.

"Okay, Mike, why here?" Tim coughed, then took a quick gulp of his drink. "I'm dying."

"I wanted some place different," Shayne said. "Off the beaten track."

"So, this is different. Off any track I ever knew. I got your message. What is it now? Why pick on me and my memory. You look kinda pale, old buddy. Any real reason for such crazy paleness in such a fair spring?"

Shayne jammed himself in at the bar. A sardine in a tin can could have moved more.

"Cognac — Martell!"

The bartender nodded:

"Cute, huh?" Tim tossed his head back towards the piano. "Know why they're playing rag-time? Scott Joplin? This is a nostalgia bar. Last time I was here, they were into *As Time Goes By*. Casablanca — World War Two. Look at 'em now. They've cycled back beyond World War One. Mike buddy, you look sick. Take your vitamins — vitamin E. Don't tell me something is bothering you?"

Shayne breathed out, then breathed in. He took a good heavy swig of Martell. It should have been a matter of minutes to fill Tim in, but Tim kept interrupting. Tim wanted to know exactly what Len Sturgis said when he showed up and stared down at Greg's dead body.

Was Len any balder? Was Len still bragging about his team? What about Janet Love? Was she recovering? What actually had happened when Mike picked her up? Was she in a dead slump beside the pool? And did all Janet's curves run the right way?

"Tim, cool it."

"Kinda like her, huh? Not a bad dish? What's with those bullets? Same as the one aimed at you?"

Slowly, Shayne sucked in a deep breath. He achieved an inch play on either side, and he got in another gulp of cognac. "You should have heard Will. He did get me all the info. Bullet's a two hundred eighty Remington —

one hundred twenty-five grains.

"Probably used in a Mannlicher sporting rifle. They stopped making them a while back. But they were imported into this country by the thousands. Bullets the same. Maybe not the same gun. I have the cute feeling it's the same person. I think a man. No woman I know could shoot that well."

Tim cocked his head to the side and away from Shayne. A wild smile bubbled up inside him. "Listen to that, Mike. Far out! Maple Leaf Rag."

"Crazy, Tim, crazy." Shayne relaxed slightly. "The minute I take Rockman's case, things start happening. First, I come out of the library. Who knows I'm there? I only spoke to Janet Love. I come out. They try to plug me.

"When I pin Janet Love down, she springs this Chancellor creep on me. Greg starts to talk. I can almost see the name forming on his lips. Bang, he gets it in the throat. What about Janet Love? She knows nothing about it.

"The hell of it is, when I talk to Rockman, all he wants to know is when I'm going to spring the killer's name on him. Only thing excited him was when I told him somebody was damn good with a Mannlicher rifle."

"Rockman's staying down here?"

"Right. Until the case is licked. Or until he's sure there's no chance."

"Where's he staying."

"Fontainebleau."

"Nice to have that kind of loot, ain't it? How about buying me a boiler maker? Since you talked me out of a nice evening of cards."

"Tim, this case bugs me. It's like an iceberg, as Rockman said. But there's more to it than that. It's like something I saw once off Black Key. You listening?"

"Yeah, sure."

Shayne sipped his cognac, content now to let the brandy take its own time. He took a deep drag on his cigaret. "Nothing much to be seen out there. Long, low swells. A few pelicans. Water clear as glass. And all those little silver fish, minnows, playing around, sparkling like mad in the sun.

"Suddenly, they start circling every which way. All mixed up — crazy. I could tell something was bothering them, but I couldn't see what it was. Up there on deck, staring down, it was like being a god or something. I could peer down forever. Brown seaweed drifted across white sand. It was another world.

"For a full two, three minutes, nothing happened. An eel flickered past. Then nothing. Fifty yards off, I could see water boiling. It pumped against the greasy surface of the swell. I caught a sudden flash of a heavy grey body, a torpedo. It came in fast ..."

"Barracuda! They work like that. I've seen them work an area myself. They kill everything in sight — quick!"

"Yeah, barracuda." Shayne lowered his glass. "A goddam barracuda. Good eating, though. I ate one in Mexico once, down in Baja — smoked."

"I wouldn't eat one."

"Rather him than me." Shayne experienced a sudden lull in the storm of talk and piano. What's happening?"

"I don't know." Tim peered over Shayne's shoulder. "Some blonde fainted, I think. They're picking her up and carrying her out now. Nobody I ever saw. What are you trying to tell me, Mike. You think that there's some big barracuda working the University?"

"Tim, I wish I knew. I have this feeling. Maybe yes, maybe no. More like something else I saw once. When I was down in the Amazon. I'd been there for a whole week, doing nothing but sitting and forgetting, drinking the godawfullest moonshine you could imagine.

"I wasn't even hunting. I had a gun, but I wasn't using it. I didn't have a camera either. But what happened in that jungle was the strangest sight I ever saw in my life."

"And you haven't forgotten?"

"I can't forget." Shayne let out a small cloud of cigaret smoke.

"No, Tim, I haven't forgotten

Here, Tim — Lucy made me out a list of people at the University. I've reduced it to five suspects. All of them are connected with Pen Rockman. Know any of them?"

Tim accepted the crumpled scrap of paper and slowly straightened it between thin crooked fingers. For a few seconds, he seemed to be trying to analyze the paper content.

"Yeah," he said at last. "Yeah, I see."

"Yeah, *what?*"

"Only one I know is this Waller-Smith. The Chaucerian. I met him once." Tim shook his head lugubriously. "An acid old codger. Quick as lightning though. He came to this party out in Bal Harbour. Had a blonde chick with him half his age. But she wasn't Pen Rockman. Not at all."

"No?"

"Why don't you trot over and see Waller-Smith? Look at that racy, lacy, foxy, moxy! *Wow!* Redhair, too! Not your usual cup of tea. See what I mean?"

"She's a hooker, Tim. I've seen her a few times out on the Beach. The guy with her is something in metals. Non-ferrous."

Shayne swung away from the hooker and her date and studied a man and a woman who didn't seem to belong. They might have stepped in straight off Madison Avenue. He recognized the man then. It was Harry Rockman's lawyer, Ben Altman. He didn't recognize the woman.

It took Tim to do that. "Hey, Mike, how about that? That's Mrs. Rockman herself. Flashy piece, right? Millicent Price Rockman. And where's little hubby now?"

"Yeah, small world. What brought them here? I wouldn't, figure Rockman's millions for a dump like this."

"You figure them, Mike. I can't." Tim leaned close to Mike's ear. "How about it? You think somebody might have followed you here?"

"No." Shayne ran his fingernail along the line of his chin. "Why would they?"

"If it matters enough for somebody to try to kill you, — maybe it matters that much for somebody to know your whereabouts." Tim winked. "Maybe you've got a tail."

"Go to hell!"

"It's your hide."

"Sure, somebody could have me tailed. But they didn't. Figure it this way, Tim. Whoever is stalking this jungle doesn't like the light. He prefers the night. He doesn't want to show his face. Hiring a tail takes talking and coming out front.

"What we've got here, Tim, is some hardnosed type who wants to protect his cover. His cover means everything. He's deep. And it's going to take a lot to smoke him out. What did you just say? With whom should I start?"

"Waller-Smith. I told you I know him. I can even fix you up

with an introduction. Start with him."

Shayne returned to his apartment. He stood in his doorway and cast a glum eye at his hatstand. He tossed his hat. It missed. He didn't bother to pick it up. Something was wrong, and he couldn't figure out what it was.

He considered his home turf. It all looked the same. Telephone, wall, door — what had changed? Snapping his gun from his underarm holster, Shayne found reassurance from the easy way it slipped into his fingers. He knew there was nobody in his apartment. He could smell its emptiness. What had happened? And why?

With care, Shayne eased himself into his favorite chair. From that angle, as he looked right, he could see more clearly what was wrong. The drawer in his end table was not fully closed. It stuck out by something like an eighth of an inch.

Shayne never left it that way. He grabbed his drawer and reached for his ancient address book. It felt the same, but Shayne knew it was not. Some stranger had leafed through it.

He cursed softly and dropped it back in the drawer.

VII

YEARS BEFORE, when Shayne had taken his little trip to Brazil, he had gone with no definite.

purpose. He had wanted to get away. For two weeks in the jungle, he had spent each day in forgetting. Remembering. Forgetting. The same record played over and over again in his brain.

At first, he didn't even think about the peccaries. They were always there.

They were cute. They were little. All around his camp, they had worn regular trails through thick jungle growth. Shayne sat in the middle of a spider web of tracks. At first, they were afraid of him, but little by little, since he sat so still, they got used to him. They ignored him and went about their business of snorting and rooting and feeding.

To the peccaries, that section of jungle was a regular Waldorf Astoria.

At certain times, though, they gyrated around as if wired to a high-voltage grid. A certain fear sent them out of sync. They made weird sounds, did weird things. Shayne wondered why.

For a long time, he simply looked on and saw nothing. He couldn't imagine what had bothered the peccaries to that extreme degree.

Finally, one day, Shayne saw the killer stalking his prey. In this case, an ancient war-torn jaguar, blacker than night, flowed from tree to tree. From the ground, the peccaries couldn't see the jaguar. They sensed him only. When the jaguar struck, his strike was

deadly. His kill was swift and merciless.

Shayne could never forget the tense, quiet air at dawn. He smelled the jungle heating up. He heard the squeak of a peccary, the rustle of gaudy birds in high leaves. A rodent rustled softly under the vines and the lianas. From time to time, the peccaries snorted softly, slowly nosing up slugs and worms.

Then, suddenly, as if a cloud had blown from nowhere, the jungle would darken and change. Peccaries leaped everywhere for cover. One ran aimlessly down a crooked trail. He fled for his life. Like a bolt of black lightning, the jaguar struck. The peccary squealed once. It was over.

Each time it was different, but Shayne got used to expecting this inevitable shadow of doom — the irrevocable presence before the kill. The jaguar moved unseen. Each time the jaguar struck from a hidden vantage point. Each doomed peccary knew he would strike, but each doomed peccary could do nothing about it. All except one...

Guided by Tim's directions, Shayne made his way to Waller-Smith's office. It was on the third floor of the Language Arts building. Shayne didn't know much about architecture, but to his mind it was Pseudo-Tudor. At any rate, it didn't fit Florida. Professor Waller-Smith invited him in.

Columns of books leaned against walls. Sheaves of papers tumbled from shelves. The professor's desk was littered with blue notebooks. There were two chairs. Waller-Smith removed two large dictionaries from one and gestured Shayne into it.

"So — well, yes, now," he said. "Tim Rourke did tell me you were coming. So you're the detective! I often wondered. What do they call you? Private Eyes? Never met one. Murder is not my cup of tea. I presume it's not for most of us. Lucky too, otherwise, there wouldn't be much of a population."

Waller-Smith had thin sandy hair. His build was thin and wiry. Shayne lowered the bull hunch of his own shoulders and smiled at the man's comments. "Thanks for letting me in. I know you're busy. I wanted to ask you about one of your students — Allison Rockman. What can you tell me about her?"

Waller-Smith leaned back, puffed out his pink cheeks three times. He adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses and then sat canted back in his walnut swivel chair. He riveted his gaze not on Shayne, but on the calendar above his desk. It was not current. It was ten years old and showed the month of April as it had been ten years previously. Why, Shayne wondered, was the professor at it? Had he circled some secret date there? What was the strange

significance of an ancient April?

"Oh, yes," Waller-Smith went on, "Private Eye — good business, is it? I don't suppose you lack for crime. Enough crime, isn't there? Even here. Even in the Ivory Tower. Even in Academe. Not much of it, of course — but enough.

"More on the level of the criminal destruction of young minds. But never mind that. Yes. Oh, I know. I know! It is April of another year. I'm well aware. So what? I don't know why I haven't changed this calendar, April? Yes, the words, the greatest words in literature ..."

"You mean?"

"Chaucer. Sure!"

Waller-Smith closed his eyes and then recited,

"What that Aprille with his
shoures soote

"The droughte of March hath
perced to the roote

"And bathed every veyne in
swich licour ...

"Imagine that lilting its way
across your tongue. *Magic!* Magic
of the pilgrimage. Magic of a
journey. The magic of words,
Shayne. *Words!*"

Shayne hunched his shoulders. "I often wondered what it sounded like. Once in school, we tackled it. But not in Middle English. A long time ago. Teacher made a hash out of it. Anyway, what I wanted was ..."

"Yes, Shayne. There's your Middle English. Not much demand for it these days. Jargon. Or worse — computers. Computerized — Idiotized. Only fault I ever found with Pen. I called her Pen, you know. She was up to her neck in computers. Loved them. Thrived on them. Nasty things.

"She was doing one of those word-count things. Academic trivia. Nothing serious. One murder for sure in Chaucer, Shayne, a little boy — Christian.

"His murder was found out. Not so much by the Mr. Sherlock Holmes of those days. More a matter of miracle. Oh, yes, an ancient saying, that! Murder will out. Matter of the *Prioress' Tale*."

"Professor," Shayne stood up. "I don't want to waste your time. I appreciate your comments. But what exactly was Allison Rockman doing with all her computer printouts? Janet Love, over at the library, told me about them. Seems Allison Rockman kept a stack in her library cubicle.

Waller-Smith puffed his cheeks into round pink balloons. "Don't know. Printouts are not my cup of tea. There was one of my colleagues once who wanted to find out, as of a certain contemporary date, where all the Kelm-scott Chaucers were. Seems he couldn't wait.

"Wanted it right now. Immediate, you see. Sure enough the libraries got it for him. Came on

a printout. What you're talking about. He showed it to me. Novel idea, anyway. Saves a lot of drudge work. Only thing I've got against my life, Shayne. Tons of drudgery. Pure and simple. A chimpanzee could do much of it and twice as fast."

"You mean legwork?" Shayne interrupted. "Such a research device could save lots of it. Some cases, you walk for miles. I think I logged a thousand miles on one of them. And I didn't get paid by the mile either."

"Somebody told me once that what Pen had over there was not really a word-list printout, either. More a matter of financial work. I know her Pa is loaded. But what Pen was doing with those financial statements I have no way of knowing. She should have stuck to her *Canterbury Tales*. Lots safer."

"You any idea what she was looking for? What got her killed, Professor Waller-Smith?"

"Not an inkling. Sorry, Shayne. I like you. Drop by some time when you're not on a case. I'll take you down some old Chaucerian alleys."

Shayne thanked him and left. When he got out into the bright white sunlight, he hesitated. He was half afraid of hearing another bullet. He heard no bullet, but as he stood gazing out across the swarming campus, a momentary illusion came to him of being back in the jungle.

As if on cue, five male students

stopped hurrying off in five separate directions. They stood still and swung around perplexed. For a second it seemed as if they too had sensed the presence of a dark killer. Shayne looked again.

As luck would have it, five different coeds had called out to them at the same time. Each slowly wandering peccary had stumbled to a halt. Now amused, Shayne watched each boy wander off with his hand tucked firmly into the hand of his girl.

VIII

ONE OF THE MAIN buildings at the university was a seven story fortress. A few gargoyles dangled from its upper parapets and gave the structure a twelfth century tone. It was used mainly by the Science Department.

From the outside, years of mildew gave the concrete the appearance of gangrene.

On top of this fortress sat a squat, long protrusion of more recent vintage. The Faculty used it as a club. To this club Waller-Smith had invited Mike Shayne for lunch.

"Easiest way of viewing your prey up close."

"My prey?"

"Yes, Shayne, your prey. For you, too, are a hunter. And those five, myself among them, whom you have so carefully screened for your search will all be assembled. Lunch being the *sine qua non* of

or faculty day."

For the occasion, Waller-Smith was most cordial and wore a well tailored suit of Irish tweed. He met the detective inside the main entrance and led him up a flight of stairs to an elevator. When they got off the elevator, Shayne followed Waller-Smith's circuitous route, down a hall, past a computer center, to another flight of stairs. Their journey ended on a flat roof adorned by ten scrawny palms and one luxurious century plant.

Waller-Smith gestured him inside. "Welcome, Shayne, welcome. We now enter the sanctum. No students allowed. No civilians allowed either. Nothing but bluebloods. The aristocracy of Academe."

Assured he was indeed a guest, Shayne followed his host into a large well-lit room. It was oval in shape and held 35 round tables. A bevy of waitresses in black- and white dirndls hurried back and forth to various groups. The atmosphere was hushed, almost reverential.

Waller-Smith led Shayne to a table near the center of the room. With a few quick nods along the way, he greeted a handful of colleagues. Each responded with a warm smile. Shayne felt more than ever out of place, but Waller-Smith as if sensing his unease, guided him to a chair and then strongly recommended the Shrimp Louis Salad.

"Anthony Foster? He's seated across the room in front of you. Head of our English Department. My boss, too, by the way. Efficient? Well, not exactly. Call him Tony. Too many literary teas. But what the hell! What the hell!"

On entering the room, Shayne had experienced a few curious glances. They were not even remotely hostile, only mildly inquisitive. As soon as Shayne and his host were seated, however, eating and conversation were resumed as if uninterrupted.

The redhead studied Anthony Foster closely. The academician had a high wide forehead, and a pale amber complexion. His mouth was on the soft side. He looked a typical English public servant type.

Shayne tried to imagine Anthony Foster with a rifle in his hands, taking up the trigger pull, bring the crosshairs onto target. Could he kill? Could he kill well? The picture didn't fit to Shayne's mind.

"To your left, Shayne, two tables over. That's Charles Lejeune, Pen's French professor. He's good — very good. Equally at home in French or English. I like him. He tones up our French Department. A brilliant mind. Seems before he came..."

"He has only one ear — the right."

"You *are* observant." Waller-Smith put down his fork, picked it

up again, pointed with it. "Lost his ear during the Nazi Occupation. That's what I heard. I don't know what he was into. Only a young man then too — in his teens. If I'm following your thoughts, it is conceivable. I'm sure, that, with his mind made up, Charles Lejeune would hesitate at nothing.

Shayne's quick observation to his left confirmed Waller-Smith's observation. Charles Lejeune wore a strong face. His jaw formed an arrogant prow and gave him a tough look. His eyes were quick and sharp, his mouth formed French sounds with rapid, intense in-and-out movement of his lips.

His hands were splendidly developed, and he ate in the European manner without any concentration whatsoever on what he was eating. His entire attention was focussed on the dark-haired, intelligent looking woman who sat opposite him.

"Anita — Anita Hollander Junior member of the French Department. She's from the midi — the south of France. But she did most of her work at the Sorbonne."

"Very striking," Shayne said with admiration. "A real winner."

"Over there," Waller-Smith made a stab with his fork to Shayne's right. "That's Jason Keller. He's the head of the French Department. Five books to his credit. He studied at the University of Wisconsin. Born and

bred there. But Jason's good.

"I don't know, Shayne. Maybe, if Jason had to do something, take some strong action, I guess ... Yes, very likely, he could."

"Could what?"

"Kill!"

Waller-Smith sat back and relaxed over his black coffee. He drew a long black cigar from an inner pocket and lit it. "And don't forget, Shayne — there's your Chaucerian. Namely *me*! I've often thought about murder.

"Why? Well, it's a little habit of mine. I'm an addict not only of Chaucer but of human psychology. Think of it, Shayne. In terms of the long-distance haul of human development, we were all born to hunt and kill. *Homo sapiens*, the killer. To my way of thinking, it's bred into the blood.

"Why do you think there's such a love of war in the human race? Amazing, isn't it? Kill or be killed! Thought about it often. What does it take for a man to use a knife? Or a gun? Or a spear? Or a bomb? Little, Shayne, very little ..."

The redhead only half-listened. He tensed, for he was becoming aware of someone else looking at him. He could sense that someone was studying him from a distance. But who was it? In front of him, or to the side, he could detect no covert movement of head or eye.

Not wishing to whip around, he continued to listen to Waller-Smith's talk about man the killer. Who was watching him? Even as

he listened he felt the chill. He thought about his black jaguar in the Amazon jungle.

"Professor?"

"Yes, Shayne, what is it?"

"There's one more. There were five on my list. You've pointed out four — yourself among them. But you're not a suspect. So where is Dean Robert Olsen?"

"Oh, he's there. Right behind you, Shayne. Two tables away. 'Whitey Olsen. Named for his silver-blond hair. I guess he's been here for ten years now. Dean for five. Scandinavian type. I don't know much about him. He's smooth, though. Soft, I would say. Rumor has it, he has money. I really have very little to do with him. But, Whitey Olsen is dean of our College of Language Arts.'"

Shayne had caught a glimpse off the polished silver blade of his table knife. "Very blond? Very smooth skin? Very white eyebrows?"

"You got him. That's our dean. He's had the nickname since childhood. Enjoys it, too. Unfortunately, Shayne, I don't like the man ..."

"Why not?"

"It's a long story. There was a young student here a couple of years back. Worked himself up through the Florida schools. Even got his Masters in English. He was headed for a Ph.D. Worked out on Chaucer. I wanted to get him a position here at the university. Olsen canned him."

IX

SHAYNE SIPPED his coffee. "But if he was that good, it doesn't seem possible. How could Dean Olsen do it to him?"

"Politics, Shayne — Politics."

Easing a cigaret from his inner pocket, the detective half-turned as he lit it. Dean Olsen paid no attention to their table. He leaned toward an administrative type in a dark business suit. Olsen had both elbows on the table, casually gesturing with both hands.

His hands looked soft and white, with no perceptible body hairs. Shayne could not see Olsen's eyes. They were protected by blue-tinted lenses in black frames. For some reason the black frames contrasted unpleasantly with the Dean's white skin and white eyebrows.

"What's with him?" Shayne muttered. "Doesn't he ever get outside? No tan? He looks half dead."

"Not Dean Olsen. He goes out. But he covers up. Summers, I hear he goes west. Don't know why. Has a wife, no kids. His wife — Kathy — a quiet type. Stays home mostly. Big place though. Her money, I guess. But, Shayne, Bob Olsen is not your man. To my mind, he doesn't have the guts for it."

When Shayne pushed away from the table and stood up, he did it so that he could look directly at Dean Olsen. If the latter was aware of Shayne's observation, he

paid no attention. Waller-Smith led Shayne to the exit and then across the roof to the stairs.

"Efficiency, Shayne! *Efficiency!* There's an elevator which comes up here. Wouldn't you know it? But it's only used for freight, not for people. People are the bane of any administrative operation. Goods, equipment, yes. People, *no!* Whoever planned this little faculty hideaway did a good job. Has all my admiration. Shayne, I enjoyed your company."

When they had walked down two flights, and were on the same level as the Computer Center, Shayne thanked Waller-Smith, shook his hand, and left him. He had suggested he would like to look around on his own for a little.

"Why not, Shayne? Go ahead. Good hunting. Remember, your prey, Shayne. Remember your prey!"

Shayne watched the spry, crusty professor dart into the down elevator. Waller-Smith moved with amazing speed for a man of sixty-five or more. Shayne glanced up and down the long green corridor and then strode towards the Computer Center.

He could not have put into words the impulse that drew him in this direction. He came to a wide orange painted door. It opened, and a girl in a white smock glanced up from an open book, but said nothing.

From the general appearance of the room, Shayne was unable to

say whether it was a hospital or a science fiction lab. He saw no computers. He saw only a few desks and a few reams of blue paper. The detective smelled a distinct metallic odor, but could not pinpoint it.

A faint humm could be heard behind inner doors, but he could not identify that, either. He had walked into an alien world. The room told him nothing. The girl did not glance up again from her book. Shayne walked out.

He passed a closet. A printed sign said *Supplies — Personnel Only*. Shayne tried the door. It was unlocked. Nobody was in the hall. No sound came from inside. The redhead opened the door and quickly closed it behind him.

He stared at the usual mops, the usual pails. He saw stacks of paper towels, toilet paper, reams of paper. Shayne raised himself on his tiptoes, and he saw something else. On the highest shelf at the back of the closet, he caught a gleam of bright polished walnut. It looked like a rifle butt.

Shayne's glimpse was momentary — the sudden crash of the door buried him with the power of an avalanche. He looked up, caught a flash impression of heavy shoulders and a bull neck. The man wore a green janitor's uniform.

Mike Shayne fought to hold his balance. He couldn't. He saw a black sap swinging at his head and that was all. He blacked out.

When he awoke, he was lying on his back in an ambulance. The girl in the white smock, who had been so silent at the Computer Center, was sitting beside him. Her amber brown eyes looked at him with warm concern.

A white jacketed medic sat across from the girl. They both told him to take it easy. As if reading his mind, the girl said, "By the way. I'm a nurse too. Alice Stevens. Happens we're putting a program through the computer. Part of our Spring Research Project. We're doing something new with Disaster Control."

A million bells rang a million tocsins in Shayne's brain, and he kept wondering what disaster.

"Who?" Shayne blurted to Nurse Stevens. "*Who* found me?"

"I did."

"Thanks."

"I got to thinking after you left. I decided you were lost or something. I came outside, and for a minute I stood next to the closet. Somebody inside was groaning. It was you."

"Who hit me?"

"I don't know. You're Mike Shayne. We looked at your wallet. We had to. We don't know what happened to you. Nobody was there."

Shayne groaned and forced himself to describe his assailant. He drew a picture of a strong, heavy body, of a heavy, sullen face, of deep-sunk eyes, and of

straggly black hair. He mentioned the green uniform.

"Hmmm ..." Alice pursed her lips. "Sounds like Kelly Smith. He's our janitor. He's usually quite harmless. I don't know what could have set him off. Did you antagonize him in some way? Did you try to take something from him?"

Shayne groaned. His mouth was horribly dry. A hurricane of red lines kept zipping back and forth across his eyeballs. He did not mention his glimpse of what looked like a hunting rifle stock. It would do no good. Shayne knew it would be equally useless to go back and look. If there had been a rifle on that shelf, in that cleaning closet, it would be gone by now.

Shayne choked down another groan and wondered only one thing. Was Kelly Smith his man? Or was there some predator even stronger? Did a more powerful man stalk like a shadow behind Kelly Smith?

X

SHAYNE HAD NOT heard from Rockman for twenty-four hours. This did not bother him. It did bother him that Rockman never seemed to be at the Fontainebleau. His wife, Millicent, had stayed for two days and then flown back to Boston. Rockman was always on the prowl at the university. What was he looking for?

The electronics mogul finally called Shayne over to his hotel. Before going up to his suite, the detective stopped at the Convenience Counter and conferred with Thelma George. He had known the plump friendly blonde for years.

"What do you think of Rockman?"

"Magazines." She sighed. "Tons of them! Expensive after-shave — *Knize Ten!*"

Upon entering the large suite, Mike Shayne was struck by the lack of light. all the drapes were drawn. Rockman sat with his back to Miami Beach's splendor of sun and ocean. His face was taut, his eyes red and strained.

"Shayne, what happened to you?"

Mike Shayne told him.

"You say you saw a rifle butt in that closet. Maybe a Manlicher? What's the point? Pen was killed with a .25."

"Listen, Rockman — "

"You listen. You failed to press charges against Kelly Smith. Who? What did Mr. Smith say about a rifle?"

"He said he never saw one."

"So...?"

"Rockman, somebody shot at me with a high-power rifle. He missed, but that does not mean he is not an expert shot. The bullets match. The one that killed Greg Chancellor — the one that missed me. Somebody is using a Manlicher bolt-action sporting rifle with 'scope."

"Very well, Shayne, who?" Rockman's eyes glowed like hot coals. "Who?"

"Rockman, I don't know — yet. But I'm damned well going to find out."

Harry Rockman caressed his knees, then flexed his hands. He didn't say a word. He didn't even look at Shayne.

"I wonder if you're right about the Mannlicher," he said finally. "Beautiful piece of tooling. I've known friends who had them. They are deadly."

Shayne said nothing.

"Yes, by George, a Mannlicher!" Rockman's face clouded. "Shayne, what do you know about computers? Printouts? Information retrieval?"

"Not much. I do know computers are used more and more in police work. For example, if I need to know if Mr. X ever stole a car, I can find out quick these days."

"Precisely, Shayne to use one of your own phrases."

When Mike Shayne left Rockman's suite, the redhead had a distinct feeling that the manufacturer was holding something back. He wondered what. But he had no real way of finding out — he could not read Rockman's mind. However, Shayne played a hunch and shadowed his client.

The chase started at the Fontainebleau on foot. Rockman meandered up and down Washington Avenue for a couple of hours. He finally caught a cab and

rode over into the old part of Miami, not far from Twelfth Street.

There, Rockman parted with his cab, and again took off on foot. Shayne stayed with him. It wasn't until they hit a certain shady pawnshop and Rockman darted into it that the detective felt he knew what Rockman had in mind.

Shayne went in shortly after, his client left. The clerk glanced up at him curiously.

"What was it you sold?"

"A forty-five."

With Rockman packing a heavy rod, Shayne began to feel that his client was about ten jumps ahead of him. What would be the purpose of the gun unless Rockman knew? This suggested the manufacturer knew or imagined he knew who Pen's killer was. How?

Shayne hung close behind him. Had Rockman been half alert, he must have noticed his tail. He didn't. For two hours, he kept to hot sidewalks and, in spite of the heat, set a fast pace. Shayne shed his coat, his tie, his hat. Rockman didn't seem to notice the heat.

At three in the afternoon, Rockman circled to Flagler, stopped at a car-rental place and drove off in a blue Lincoln. Shayne picked up a small compact and followed. Rockman barreled across Miami, caught the Tamiami, cruised through the suburbs and headed west.

About 60 miles out, Rockman

swung onto a county trunk and slowed down. Shayne kept well back. When the New Englander swung into a sand trail through the sugar pines, Shayne almost missed it. The detective pulled up a few yards beyond and waited. As he waited a hawk circled lazily, a rabbit skittered across the dirt road.

Shayne felt the blast of the heat, and what he heard confirmed his guess. It was the sound of a .45. Apparently testing his marksmanship, Rockman blasted off ten more shots.

The redhead eased back onto the county road, swung around and headed back towards Miami. It was not much of a job to do a front tail on Rockman. The man was oblivious to everything but staying on the road and avoiding accidents. Rockman now drove his blue Lincoln down to normal cruising speed, and the redhead wondered where he would halt.

His first stop was at a small clothing store in Miami South West. There, he purchased a black sweater, a pair of black slacks and a pair of black gloves. He had asked for a black ski-mask, but the slim, fashion-conscious sale's lady laughed at him.

"What else did he want?" Shayne asked her. "Was he angry? What did he say?"

"Not much. He was a little put out. That's all. But he said he had another solution. I don't know what he was talking about."

"I do," Shayne said and hurried out to his rental.

The blue Lincoln was disappearing in the distance. As Shayne pulled back into the stream of traffic, he tried to make up his mind about Rockman's activities. Was it revenge? Or was it something else? Who was Rockman chasing? It had to be one of the five.

But what if Rockman hit the wrong man?

The thought of Rockman making a mistake bothered Shayne. What was keeping his client going? He had not eaten. He had not stopped for anything to drink.

An hour later, Rockman pulled into a vast parking lot near the university. He hurried out of his big Lincoln. Shayne watched him enter a phone booth. Rockman stayed in the phone booth for less than thirty seconds.

Before getting back in the Lincoln, the New Englander took a quick look around. Shayne dropped below his dash, and apparently Rockman was happy with what he saw or didn't see.

The next stop was a small drive-in on South Bay Shore — where he ordered a big hamburger and a chocolate malt and ate in his car. An odor of salt and dried seaweed blew in from the ocean. Shayne was content. From the far side of the drive-in, he could watch his client and munch his own hamburger. It was a far cry from the Golden Cock, but at that point he

was grateful for anything.

XI

ROCKMAN'S NEXT STOP was a corner drug store. Shayne, uneasy and aware his client could easily disappear, waited in his rented compact. Rockman emerged a few minutes later with a small paper sack.

It was now that in between time when neon spill and rapidly fading light blend into dark confusion. Shayne had difficulty following the blue Lincoln.

Rockman headed towards the university.

Shayne stayed a block behind.

At the university, Rockman pulled into a campus parking lot and sat in his car. By then, most of the students had gone and the lot lay empty and deserted. One solitary white gull scavenged discarded sandwiches from black tarmac.

Little by little, it grew darker, with only an occasional street lamp to offset the night. Shayne thought about the oncoming night. He knew it would be dark for a good three hours. The moon would not be up until midnight.

Rockman waited.

Shayne waited.

Rockman swung out of his car, picked the paper bag off the rear seat, slammed the door. The small sack looked awkward and heavy. The electronics mogul's course took him past the library, past the

Administration Building to the Science Building, where he turned right.

There, he darted ahead down a narrow path. Shayne could see that his client knew the campus like the palm of his hand. Rockman stopped in front of a two-story building tucked under tall palms. Shayne noted a sign that read *LANGUAGE LAB*. In the distance, the redhead could make out the irregular outlines of a fence and the dark empty spaces of the playing fields.

Satisfied nobody but himself was around, Rockman darted into the Language Lab.

Shayne followed, then retreated when he realized Rockman had entered the men's room. Five minutes later, his client came out. He was now wearing a black sweater, black slacks, black gloves. He had coated his face with a black preparation and looked like a commando on a raid. His paper bag was folded into a small compact package.

Rockman's destination puzzled the detective. He kept a hundred yards back. The older man stopped at a bench beside the path and sat down. First he looked at his wristwatch, then tossed the paper bag up and down in his right hand. Shayne watched him from behind the trunk of a tall palm.

An occasional late student hurried past in the darkness. The redhead heard two of them chattering about some beer joint.

When they were gone, Rockman moved silently to the chain metal fence surrounding the playing fields. He climbed swiftly and well. Whatever had been in his paper bag had been thrust into his waistband.

Mike Shayne waited, then walked over and picked up Rockman's discarded paper bag. He recognized the smell of Three in One oil. The inner area of the playing fields lay in total darkness, but getting into them was the problem. Shayne feared the outer street lamps would silhouette him against the fence. He decided to wait a few moments.

When he did move his shirt ripped in his struggle to get over the top. His slacks tore. Before dropping to the ground, Shayne hung on top for several seconds, listening. He heard no sound.

The redhead picked himself up and set out after Rockman. Following a black cat would have been easier. His client moved through the night with the silence and fluid ease of a jaguar. For someone who must have spent most of his life at a desk, he had adapted easily to the ways of a hunter.

Earlier, with Waller-Smith, Shayne had noted the shape of the playing fields. They lay roughly in the shape of a giant figure eight. Rockman circled the first loop with great caution, then made his way to a low shed.

It looked to be where the ground

keepers kept their tools. From a distance of a hundred yards, Shayne watched Rockman climb to the low roof. His shadow sank slowly into that of the roof itself. He lay there, stretched out, waiting.

Shayne felt certain his client had a gun in his hand.

Until this point the long trek through the night had made some sense to Shayne. Rockman was crazy. Rockman wanted revenge. But it didn't make sense to the detective for Rockman to take up position in the middle of a dark and deserted playing field. What was he waiting for? Apart from Shayne, nobody else was there!

Shayne moved from one clump of bushes to another. His sense of timing felt out of synch. He couldn't gear his movements to Rockman's strange behavior. Less confused, he might have been better prepared for the jogger. The detective slid behind a clump of shrubbery not a second too soon. The jogger passed mere feet away.

Shayne lay on his stomach and listened to the hard padding sound of feet fading in the night. The jogger's easy, controlled breathing remained strong in his ear. Shayne stifled a curse. The receding jogger too was also attired in black.

The redhead went into a crouch. He could see neither Rockman, nor the jogger. Again he visualized the figure-eight shape of the

playing fields, the jogging track that ran around their periphery, the low shed where Rockman crouched sat at the crossing of the loops.

The jogger was now headed out around the outer loop of the eight. When he had swung the circle, he would be returning to the point where the tracks crossed. The logic of Rockman's placement became all too apparent to Shayne. His client couldn't miss.

The detective began a rapid belly-hugging crawl towards the shed. The grass was wet. He slipped. His chin dug turf. He couldn't make speed. He felt exposed. A crab scurrying on a pane of glass couldn't have been more awkward.

A low hedge stopped him. He had to vault it. Jumping the hedge made him drop his .45, and he couldn't find it in the dark. He counted the minutes until the jogger would reappear. He had to get to Rockman fast.

By the time Shayne was within thirty yards of the shed, he could hear the quick pad, pad, pad of the jogger's feet. Rockman's dark shape hung low on the roof. Shayne knew his client's gun was cocked and ready. He could almost hear its savage blast.

With a last burst of energy, Mike Shayne hurled himself across the remaining distance. He had to get Rockman off that roof. He jumped. The manufacturer saw him and kicked out. Shayne fell,

Shayne jumped again.

This time, he caught Rockman's ankle. He twisted. His client tumbled and fell, landing on top of the redhead. Even then Rockman still clung to his .45. Shayne grabbed Rockman's wrist. He levered it back and the .45 dropped.

"No," Rockman begged, "No!"

"You can't kill a man like that. That's murder."

"Shayne, you can't stop me!"

With Rockman's gun well out of reach, the detective let Rockman up into a sitting position. They were both sitting there, panting and out of breath, when the mysterious jogger swung past in the dark. His face was invisible. Shayne had no idea who it might be.

"Shayne, I had an idea it was you. Why did you stop me?"

"You told me you didn't want revenge."

"Revenge?" Rockman muttered. "Who wants revenge? I wanted to swat an insect. A mosquito!"

"Who is it?" Shayne relaxed his hold on Rockman's wrist and allowed him to stand up. "Who was the jogger?"

Rockman's laugh came in a hard, cold bark. "You're the detective — not me! If you want to find out, do your own thing. But not at my expense. You're fired!"

The jogger did not return. Rockman turned and walked slowly

back to the fence. He climbed over and then returned to his rental.

Mike Shayne did the same.

XII

THE NEXT AFTERNOON, Mike Shayne pulled into a parking lot at the university. It was marked *Visitors*. He cast a quick look at the cars. They came from every state in the nation. The detective's head throbbed. He glanced up at the Administration Building where he knew the president had his office, and his headache increased.

The building rose like the control tower of an airport. With a shiver of disgust, Shayne remembered Jim Gardner's words.

"Mr. Shayne, I hope it would not inconvenience you too much to be present at a little meeting tomorrow afternoon. Say, four o'clock. I think we should have a little chat."

A little chat! Those three words put the finishing touches to Shayne's head. He wanted a good stiff drink of cognac. Why? He had put away far too many the night before. So Rockman had fired him. So what?

Gardner's voice had held a sharp edge.

What was he planning?

Shayne wound his way up the concrete walk. The main door was aluminum and smoked glass.

Would Rockman be present at this meeting? Who would be there?

A huge kidney-shaped desk dominated the office. Jim Gardner sat behind it. Rockman stood behind him. On his left, Len Sturgis wore a tight-lipped look of wary distaste. Two county deputies were with him. Will Gentry was not there. Shayne was not surprised. Will would not knuckle under to anybody.

"Shayne!"

He felt like a boy entering the principal's office to be reprimanded. He wanted to tell somebody to shove it.

He put on the brakes and swung a look around the room. There was a handful of lawyers — a handful of deans. He recognized only one attorney, a man he knew from Bal Harbour.

Except for Jim Gardner's first brief barking of his name, nobody said a word.

Mike Shayne approached the desk, looked for a chair, found none, remained standing.

"Shayne," Jim Gardner said, glancing up from a notepad. "Thanks for coming."

Shayne glanced at Len Sturgis.

Sturgis coughed and looked embarrassed. The redhead ran a fingernail along the hard line of his chin, said, "For what? A lynching?"

The lawyer from Bal Harbour stepped forward. He had a heavy face, a pencil-thin mustache.

"Mr. Shayne, it would be wrong for me to say that I'm not concerned. I am. Ben Altman was unable to come down here. So I'm filling in for him.

"Mr. Rockman has agreed that he has made a mistake. After giving due and careful consideration to every aspect of your investigation, Mr. Rockman has concluded —"

"Concluded, what?" Shayne snapped. "I'm already fired."

"I'm sorry if there is some misunderstanding," the lawyer continued, "Mr. Rockman is quite content for you to keep the retainer he gave you. He has decided, quite rightly I believe, that the case involving his daughter has been closed."

Shayne snapped a look at Len Sturgis. "You're satisfied? You didn't come up with a killer. But you're satisfied."

"Mike," Len said weakly, "Considering everything, I think it's for the best."

"A killer loose," Shayne countered, "and you kill the case?"

Jim Gardner raised a restraining hand. "Mr. Shayne, *please!* I'm sure we can reach a mutual understanding. We have come to a mutual agreement that nothing can be gained by pursuing this case any further."

Shayne stared at his former client. Rockman smiled a line-tight smile. It was becoming increasingly clear to the redhead

that Rockman had manufactured this meeting for one purpose only. They were snowing him.

"Mr. Shayne," Rockman said, "I'm sorry. I think you did a good job. But I do not want this investigation continued. Chief Sturgis has pointed out to me that they are now holding a certain John Beetly. He hung out on campus. He was seen with Pen. He ..."

"Okay, Len," Shayne said. "What are you holding him on?"

"Homicide. He confessed."

"After two years?"

"He was picked up on an Armed Robbery charge. Drug offender. He wanted to clean up his past."

"And you believed him?" Shayne stared at Len, incredulous. "Okay, so who shot at me?"

Len looked embarrassed. "We checked out that phone booth a day later. When Will ... There was nothing wrong with it."

"And Greg Chancellor. You saw that one, Len. I suppose I imagined that one too!"

Once again, Rockman's. Bal Harbour lawyer stepped in. "No reason to be angry, Mr. Shayne." His voice was smooth. "You simply haven't kept up. Greg Chancellor was killed by a jealous lover. Janet Love was seeing two men. Greg was one. Cleve Roberts was the other. She threw Roberts out. And then ..."

Shayne shook his head, said, "Go on."

"And then this Cleve Roberts came back and shot Greg Chancel-

lor. Chief of Detectives Sturgis has a warrant out for his arrest. I'm sure they'll pick him up anytime. If I were you, Mr. Shayne ..."

Shayne shut his mouth tightly. He would be damned if he said one more word. He concentrated the full strength of his disgust on Rockman's hawk face. What good would it have done to reveal Rockman's attempted ambush? Whose word would be believed?

"So, you see, Mr. Shayne." Jim Gardner smiled a suave smile. "It's all settled. Mr. Rockman will be returning to Boston tomorrow morning. If you had ever met Cleve Roberts, I'm sure that you would agree he is the culprit."

Dean Robert Olsen stepped into the room.

"Yes, Bob, what is it?"

"President Gardner, forgive me for interrupting, but you are needed in the Faculty Lounge on a matter of some importance."

A reflection of several faces glinted off Dean Olson's dark lenses. He turned and left.

Jim Gardner rose from his desk. Rockman stepped back. Two deans stirred restlessly. If Len Sturgis had not given him a weak smile, Shayne would not have reacted as he did. He grabbed Jim Gardner by the shoulder.

"How much — how much is he paying you?"

Gardner tried to pull away. Even as they were locked together, the huge mahogany door crashed open. A mammoth gorilla

on the rampage would have been no match for Kelly Smith. At sight of him, Shayne dropped Gardner.

He charged Smith. Smith charged him. Deans and lawyers scattered. The only one who didn't move was Rockman. One deputy clung to Shayne. The other to Smith. Neither could have prevented a blood bath. Len Sturgis did that. He whipped out his .38.

"Okay," he said quietly. "Knock it off."

"Mr. Kelly," the Bal Harbour lawyer used his smoothest voice, "what happened? What did Mr. Shayne do to you?"

"He was in my closet. Stealing things. I didn't want him there."

Words struggled slowly out of Kelly's throat, but Shayne didn't listen. Len Sturgis pulled him out of the office and told him to get lost.

"Mike, listen, it's for your own good."

Shayne felt his anger mounting. But he knew he didn't stand a chance with Rockman dealing all the cards.

He walked back to his Buick and swung in. He switched on the ignition.

"Damn!"

He stared out at it, and knew it was the final straw. Somebody had given him a parking ticket. He grabbed it. He stared for a long time before the message sank in. The university letterhead told him

nothing. The message did.

13C! Midnight!

Never in his life had Shayne felt less like being toyed with. He crumpled the paper. What did it matter who had written it? Somebody had flung a challenge in Shayne's face. He was going to accept it.

XIII

INSIDE THE LIBRARY, the darkness was total. Outside, there was a full Klieg light Miami moon, looking as if made of coated white stucco with a splendor reminiscent of Hollywood in its prime. Shayne did not waste time on the moon.

He had entered the library early in the evening and worked his way slowly into the stacks. His black turtleneck sweater, his brown tweed jacket made him look a professor to the one person who questioned him. Now, with tweed jacket discarded, he held his .45 low and at his side.

The seventh level of the stacks congealed into a cold gel. Shayne had to fight his way through it. He moved silently on old sneakers. The metal shelves chilled his touch. Why the note? Why Cubicle 13C? Once again, Shayne remembered the jaguar flowing effortlessly from tree limb to tree limb. The peccary reared up, trembled, broke into a frantic run.

The library was empty. The

librarians had locked it at ten p.m. Now even the janitors had gone. It was close to midnight.

Midnight! Yet Shayne sensed that he would have to wait. During the last half hour, hunched in the narrow aisle between the books, he had conquered the urge to smoke, the urge to spit, the urge to sneeze.

He listened with his mouth half open. Metal creaked, and his jaw froze in a tight rictus of a smile. It was nothing. He relaxed, letting his head touch a steel support. The sound came to him distinctly. It was movement, but it was not movement. It was scarcely audible as a sound. It flowed, imperceptibly, ruthlessly through the stacks.

Shayne held his breath.

He heard a footstep. The hairs crisped at the back of his neck.

He controlled his breathing. He listened. A faint scratching, perhaps a sleeve brushing a shelf, came from the next aisle. He saw nothing. The rows of books were black barriers.

Shayne slipped to where his aisle began and glided around into the next. He held his .45 ready. The darkness was total, and he had to stop to listen. Again and again, he picked up a faint scratching.

Someone stood in front of him.

Someone hissed softly through wide-open nostrils. Shayne crooked his left arm around a man's neck. With the same quick movement, he jammed his .45 into

a dark back. Teeth snapped shut. Shayne heard a sudden wheeze and snort of fear.

A gun fell.

Knize Ten! The man's after-shave lotion identified him. After their fight in the playing fields, Shayne couldn't forget Rockman's distinctive scent. He had his ex-client by the throat.

"He's going to get away."

"Who is getting away?"

"Olsen!" Rockman spit out the name. "Dean Olsen. He killed my daughter. He raided my company."

"How?"

"Shayne, you're wasting time. You wouldn't understand. Olsen got his fangs into my daughter. She brought him some of my plans of her own free will. But then he got greedy. He sold out to Syncom. They paid him a quarter of a million. He wanted more. That's why she had those printouts. She suspected him."

"Where's Olsen now?"

"I don't know."

"Why did you set me up in Gardner's office?"

"I apologize. Money, Shayne, money. And I wanted Olsen myself."

Shayne could not see Rockman's face. He did not want to see it. He was now sure of whom he was after. Olsen had hidden rifles across the campus. Olsen was the secret hunter. Dean Robert Olsen was predator.

"One thing," Shayne whis-

pered. "What else was he after?"

"Power," Rockman said softly. "Power! It's one of the fringe benefits of my invention. It can pull information from any memory source — accessible or inaccessible."

"What does that mean?"

"Illicit — restricted — confidential. Olsen could acquire knowledge of financial transactions of the highest order. Olsen milked them out. Syncom wouldn't go that far. Olsen would. Government restrictions meant nothing to him. Shayne, give me back my gun!"

"Like hell!" Shayne snapped a pair of cuffs on Rockman and forced him to sit on the floor of the aisle. "You're staying here. I don't want you in my way."

Instants later, a flash of light blossomed through the dark stacks. It came from the cubicle where Pen Rockman had been killed. From the very first, Mike Shayne had wondered about a final decision being made there. He pushed his way into the darkness.

A book fell. The light went out. Silence settled.

Shayne wondered about Rockman. Was he telling the truth? Each second of darkness tore at Shayne's breathing. From the beginning, he had hated that library.

"Shayne!"

The whisper came from a vast distance, and Shayne could not

trace its origin. It was not Olsen's voice. It was mechanical, sharp, feline. Shayne tensed. He elevated his .45.

"Shayne."

The whisper grew remote, distant, faded rapidly. Slowly Shayne rotated his head, attempting to pinpoint the sound.

"Shayne!"

The whisper was behind him now, at his elbow. Shayne whipped around and, as he did so, flexed his trigger finger. He didn't shoot. Nothing was there. Black forms of black books receded into blackness.

"Shayne!"

The whisper faded rapidly. Before following it, Shayne knelt and removed his sneakers. For a moment he regretted not alerting Tim, not saying something to Lucy. To push Pen's killer to one final act was crazy.

"Shayne!"

Each step cost Mike Shayne. The chill in the library was so intense, he wondered what had happened to all Miami's heat.

"Here, Shayne, *here!*"

Why was each whisper so different? Was it a mechanical device. Dean Olsen's voice sounded inhuman, animal. What was that gurgling sound? Where had Shayne heard it before? The detective caught a strange scent in the darkness. Was it oil? Was it a wet book? Was it blood?

Olsen's catlike whisper quickly receded. Olsen was dragging out

his cat-and-mouse game. For several seconds, Shayne clutched his .45 so hard its grip turned oily and wet in his palm.

"Shayne!"

Olsen was clever. His whisper came from a distance. Shayne moved toward the sound. A huge figure in black stepped from an adjoining aisle and slid behind him. Olsen's economy of action was remarkable. He tapped Shayne on the extreme nerve point of his right elbow. Shayne's heavy .45 clattered to the floor.

"Okay, Shayne."

Dean Olsen snapped on a light and stood there, covering the red-head with a sleek Mannlicher sporting rifle. A black face mask covered Olsen's face. A mechanical voice device had been fitted into the mask.

"You're not surprised?"

"No."

XIV

SHAYNE CAREFULLY considered the deadly figure with its deadly gun. Once again his mind jumped back to the Amazon. The black jaguar had looked soft, smooth, harmless. Olsen, too, looked smooth and soft, but he was not.

Olsen slowly raised his rifle. "You picked up my challenge. Why?"

"Elimination. It had to be you. Or it had to be Charles Lejeun."

"That dolt!"

"Why did you kill Greg?"

"Greg was a very nice boy. Helpful, but stupid. He had to be silenced. He had learned about some of my — extracurricular activities."

"And Kelly Smith? How did you con him into helping you?"

"Kelly always liked me. I met him in Idaho. A simple creature with one joy. Fishing. I've always given him free use of my boat."

"Why thirteen-C?"

"Pen Rockman's cubicle. I'm sure it brought you here. It's an old cliché, Shayne. Do you know it?"

"Yeah."

"Sure, you do! The killer always returns to the scene of his crime. That's madness, Shayne. I would never return to any of my kills. No more than a ..."

"No more than a jaguar returns to his."

"Nice metaphor, Shayne. Neatly turned. But it won't help you. You're dead, Shayne. It's the killing part that interests me the most. And when you're dead, Rockman's next."

"Rockman's not here."

"You lie, Shayne. He's here."

"Olsen, I've told Lucy Hamilton where I am. Tim Rourke. Will Gentry. They all know."

Olsen laughed, and his voice device made his laughter sound like a hyena's wild scream.

"Shayne, you told nobody. You wouldn't involve your friends in something you could not handle.

I've studied your psychology, Shayne. I looked at your address book. I know exactly how you work. You're direct. You don't play games. But you're playing one now."

"Why did you shoot Greg in the throat?"

"You should know, Shayne. A predator always goes for the throat. It makes for a cleaner kill. I've hunted all my life. Nobody knows that. Too bad I missed you in the phone booth. It would have saved you a lot of suffering."

"But you missed!" Shayne snapped it out.

Olsen shrugged. "It sometimes happens, Shayne — to the best of us. The movement of a twig. A gust of wind. Now, Shayne, turn around ... slowly. Straight ahead. Up those stairs."

As they progressed, Olsen kept snapping on lights. He knew where every switch was. Shayne mounted the stairs slowly. He counted on some slip of attention or some mistake. But Bob Olsen made no mistakes. Nothing distracted him.

"Shayne, you know what a hundred twenty-five grain bullet does? It drops an elk at three hundred yards in full flight. I've done it often, Shayne. On this roof, in this moonlight, it's going to be even better.

"Olsen, you don't stand a chance of getting away with it. They'll start looking for your

rifles."

"No way, Shayne. It is an expensive hobby. But each time I make a kill, I discard the barrel. Deep Six! Fifty miles out. No way, Shayne, no way!"

Shayne analyzed his chance of swinging back and dislodging the rifle from Dean Olsen's grasp. He rejected the thought. Olsen was alert to Shayne's slightest movement.

"Shayne?"

"Yeah."

"You ready?"

Seemingly the moonlit roof stretched into infinity. The hard stone surface was coated with silver, slick and smooth as arctic ice. Shayne stared out across it, wondering what Janet Love was thinking, wondering if Pen Rockman had ...

"Why did Rockman call his daughter Pen?"

Shayne's question caught Olsen by surprise, and he gave a sudden, hard laugh. "You mean you don't know? Rockman didn't tell you? But I guess not many people know the real reason. It's an acronym. Prepare Envelope Now! That's how Rockman gave Allison her weekly allowance."

"That's all?"

"That's all. I want you to know one thing, Shayne — I didn't want to kill Allison. I was really very fond of her. She had accomplished so much for me. It was only when I found she was prying through my deposits ..."

"Okay, Olsen. I'm ready."

Olsen gave a slight upward tilt to his rifle. "I'll count to three. This gun has a silencer. You won't even hear it. And, from what I understand from experts who know, it is totally painless. No more than a sudden flash of light at the base of the skull. No time to scream. Totally silent!"

"You were not always silent. When you killed that poor stupid Greg, you didn't even bother with a silencer. You shot with a high-powered rifle. In a relatively closed area. Even from a distance, it sounded like a bomb going off."

"Enough talk. Ready! *One!*"

"Greg wouldn't have told me your name. He was too scared. He knew what you could do. He left letters naming you as —"

"He left no letters. *Two!*"

Shayne was unable to provoke Olsen. Shayne knew escape would take cold, calm calculation. He would have to control his nerves well. Olsen would not shoot instantly. He would give the red-head twenty feet, more, a hundred yards. Shayne visualized the length of a football field.

Then the dean would shoot. That was Olsen's game. But it was no game. It was slaughter. Shayne visualized Olsen taking up the trigger pull. He sensed the bullet waiting. During the first few yards, Shayne would have to make his move.

Gritting his teeth, Shayne moved on with long easy strides.

He pictured it totally in his mind. He timed his fall to be an exact duplicate of the way he had seen a heart-attack victim fall on Flagler Street. When Shayne pitched forward, his hands clutched his chest, his knees collapsed.

Would Olsen fire?

It had happened in the Amazon. The only time Shayne had seen the jaguar break his spring was when the peccary tumbled into an inert heap and lay still. Checking his leap in mid-spring, the jaguar backed away, circled, left.

Unlike the jaguar, Olsen would not leave his kill. He would stalk out slowly to make sure. It took several seconds. Olsen's dark shoes slid soundlessly across the roof. He walked as a hunter walks, his toes finding a sure surface, his heels following. He held his Mannlicher ready.

Several feet away, Olsen stopped.

"Shayne."

Shayne did not move a muscle. Only his left eye kept watch. He knew Olsen had to make one more test. The redhead lay ready and waiting. He steeled himself to the hard point of the shoe kicking his stomach. He did not grunt. He did not flinch. Disgusted now, Olsen growled angrily through his face mask. Shifting his rifle to his left hand, he knelt. Mike Shayne was ready. He whipped over and grabbed the rifle.

A bullet ploughed the roof.

Stone splinters sliced Shayne's face. He tore at the rifle. It was slippery and smooth. Olsen wrenched the rifle from the detective's grasp and whipped into firing position. Shayne kicked Olsen's ankle. With all his strength, Shayne launched himself in a flying tackle. Olsen crashed to the roof.

Olsen's rifle slid away, and, as it slid, Olsen scrambled after it. With cold, savage satisfaction, Shayne hammered first one fist then another into Olsen's neck.

Olsen came up in a crouch. Shayne tried to catch Olsen's right arm, but the killer hurled him off. Shayne went spinning.

Olsen quickly realized his mistake. It was not an act of logic which had caused him to hurl Shayne in the direction of the rifle.

Shayne landed inches away. Without hesitation, he grabbed it. He worked the bolt and swung around. Olsen leaped across the roof. Shayne, prone, snapped the rifle into position and fired.

Olsen snarled and fell.

For seconds, Shayne lay limp. He was alive. Kicking himself free from the lifeless dark form, Shayne rose shakily to his feet. He stared at a dark figure in a dark doorway. It was Rockman.

"Shayne?"

"Yeah."

"Shayne, I owe you something. Plenty! Get these goddamn handcuffs off me. I can't write a check with them on."



Demand Note

by JACK LEAVITT

Shelly owed Moatzie a big favor for something that had happened long ago and far away — but the debt had to be in blood!

ON THE TELEPHONE, Morris Shulman — *Moatzie* — sounded afraid that if he stopped talking I would forget old debts. “Harry, that *shlepp*, became a school principal,” he kept reminiscing about Brownsville, the Brooklyn slum I moved away from years ago, leaving him with a demand note on my life.

“And Seymour Kandler, the only one who visited me in the joint, is a regular rabbi in Texas. With a ten gallon *yarmulka*.” The Yiddish inflections would have made anyone laugh until he saw Moatzie’s rap sheet.

“It’s been a long time, Moatzie.” I settled into my easy chair and put down the legal memo I had been drafting when

the phone rang in my study. The City Council resolution would have to wait. “I’m glad you called. I’d hate to have missed hearing from you.”

Every lawyer, especially when he holds office, has to decide whether to list his home telephone number. Mine is listed, but without an address. Visits here were by invitation.

“Doc Baroff, who’s selling insurance in Detroit now, told me how to reach you.”

“Doc? That *momzer*. Five, maybe six, years ago he passed through here.” I found myself slipping into word patterns I grew up with and ever since tried to discard.

The view of San Francisco Bay through my study window, where a flame-red sunset embraced the Golden Gate Bridge, had nothing to do with my immigrant-and-roach-filled tenement upbringing 3,000 miles away. Nothing except Moatzie. We were first generation Americans who shared poverty, cunning, youth and a common enemy — the world.

"So what brings you to California?"

He paused, weighing answers. "Y'know, I never before been here."

"The navy paid for *my* first visit. After law school I returned on my own. Better than Livonia Avenue and the garbage cans."

"They got a housing project now. No more garbage cans. Everybody steals 'em..."

"Our kids are lucky."

"I never had kids, Shelly. My last wife walked out on me. And Lorraine died young. I thought you knew that."

I did. Each year, in September, I found myself alone, crying back memories. Once, on a doorstep carpeted with cigaret butts and candy wrappers, I held her close. "I love you, Lorraine, only I can't see you again." She would never know why I walked away.

"Every so often I think of her," Moatzie laughed. Had he ever loved her, too? "She wasn't so bad. I'll tell you, though, I bet if she was alive today, another *yenta* from the doorsteps, we'da been

divorced years ago. Shelly, you got a bargain from me."

My silence must have terrified him. He screeched, "Hey, Shelly, Shelly. I was kidding. I forget what she meant to you."

The study air became caustic, hard to breathe. On the wall the oil-colored forest misted over. My eyes watered. As I rubbed them, my fist grinding away the pain, Moatzie dropped his voice.

"I don't talk about the roof," the receiver whispered. Nothing more.

I shook the telephone hand-piece. "You still there?" No answer. This time the silence frightened me.

"He took the first swing," I shouted at the past. The Golden Gate Bridge, so vivid a moment ago, became a Brooklyn tenement landscape, four stories up. A telephone cord tied me to that vanished September.

"You mean that kid. — Harold Feltzer?"

"Who else? Moatzie, you're jabbing me."

"Shelly, you're too sensitive. Everybody does things he's sorry for. That's why we pay taxes to build prisons."

Those tar-covered roofs, side by side for a square block — Stone Avenue, Livonia Avenue, Christopher Avenue, Riverdale Avenue, — locked together by common tenement walls. Broken latches on every rooftop door so tenants could get up or down any

warren in the...the low walls between roof and roof, making it easy to hop over...the low wall between roof and emptiness, making a return from the pavement impossible.

"Feltzer was crazy. He thought I was spying on him."

Moatzie's voice was syrupy. "The kid fell down, *Nu?* Everybody said it was probably an accident."

Even the lightweight phone felt heavy. I shifted it to my right hand. "You know what it was. He was reaching for a brick. I'm sure of it."

"Whaddya expect from a *meshugena* kid? He was fourteen years old. You were seventeen. You shoulda gone back downstairs. There wasn't a brick for miles." Moatzie's voice had turned venomous.

"He outweighed me!" After all these years I was still pleading for understanding. "All I wanted to do was push him away and be alone. I had two exams the next day."

"Four stories down. *Puhlopp!* How were your grades?"

Harold Feltzer — big, clumsy, retarded — left a gash on my cheek that still throbbed. "You saw it from the pigeon loft, Moatzie. You know..."

"...that they would've found you bleeding on the roof if I didn't get there first. Try to beg your way outa manslaughter, Shelly. Going to my apartment was the best

thing you ever did in your life."

"I owe you that, Moatzie."

He chuckled. "You paid, Shelly. Tit for that. You stayed away from Lorraine like I asked. We both came out winners. I understand you're a brilliant lawyer now."

"Is that why you phoned?"

"I'm in Oakland, near Witkin's Drive-In Restaurant." Moatzie was matter of fact, in charge of my evening. If he had threatened me, I would have hung up. But how could I explode at such a casual note? "When can you get me?"

"Don't you have a car?"

"The last car I wired, Shelly, brought me here from Salt Lake City. Next year, when they find it in the airport lot, I want 'em to think I flew outa town on the first jet. What're you driving?"

My Mercedes was a signature car — personalized license plates and a City Council sticker that heralded every stop I made. Our Ford was unpretentious, cluttered with odds and ends Brenda wanted taken to our Gold County cabin. Driving would be crowded, with cargo poking us at every bounce. "Red Ford, Moatzie. Two door."

"I'll be walking around the block with a hamburger. Come alone."

Brenda asked no questions — business calls were as confidential as I wanted them to be, provided she had equal charge of social arrangements — and I left home with a preoccupied kiss. From the

Berkeley hills to the East Shore freeway, with the fading sun in my eyes and a spice rack clattering in the back seat, I remembered the old neighborhood, the immigrant enclave where I refused to learn Yiddish because I was an *American*.

Moatzie, the thug, was a better son than I was. When his mother and mine shopped together at the supermarket — bread was twelve cents a loaf then — Moatzie would meet them and help carry packages. His parents died happier than mine did. For that, too, he had an edge on me. Is that why I keep running for reelection?

"Twenny pounds, Shelly?"

"More like thirty."

"You used to be skinny. The door unlocked?" Moatzie was standing alongside the open car window, muddy-haired, medium height, bad teeth. A paunch showed under his gray wool jacket and his neck bulged out of his shirt collar. Either he had also gained weight or his clothing belonged to someone much smaller than he was. What were the fashions in Salt Lake City?

"Slide in, Moatzie. Any junk in the way, shove it aside."

"Stinks from *dreck*," he threw a dirt-encrusted trowel behind him. "This is how a big time, brilliant lawyer drives clients around?"

"I manage."

"Good thing you have a clean record. You can get away with anything."

I kept my eyes front, watching his smirk with side vision. "How about coffee, Moatzie? I'm not in a barroom mood."

"Just use gas."

Past the Civic Center complex, successor to Skid Row, I eased onto San Pablo Avenue and travelled in the slow lane. "Used to be the main road to Sacramento. Not a single movie theatre for miles. We lived for those shows."

Moatzie snapped his fingers. "Rosemary LaPlanche in *The Devil Bat's Daughter*. I'm in love again."

"Frances Gifford in *Nyoka, The Jungle Girl*. I'm still in love."

We both laughed, friends again. Almost... The first time Moatzie shaved he cut his ear and I rescued him with my father's styptic pencil. When he singled me home from second, we made the boys' club finals...

"Hey," he whacked my shoulder. "*Big Sky*." The wheel jerked. "You owe me sixty-five cents."

From the back seat the spice rack fell. I straightened the wheel, glanced over my shoulder to see the mess and wondered whether Brenda would pout because her flea market treasures were broken. My driving would count more than her packing as a cause of disaster.

"In the waffle place," Moatzie slapped me again. His face was jubilant. "We hadda eat there to show Lorraine what a big spender you were. You even made me go to

the men's room to give you the money."

A green-and-white bus straddled two lanes in front of us, exhaust pipe smoking. Trying not to breathe, I said, "*Yellow Sky*, with Gregory Peck." When the bus slowed to pick up a passenger I scooted ahead. "And Danny Kaye, in person, at the Roxy." I knew every hour of that evening, my last real date with Lorraine, four days before I went to the rooftop to study. "After the accident, Moatzie, we didn't see much of each other."

"Shelly, friends are supposed to forget. It was like spending the sixty-five cents on myself." As Moatzie talked, he kept looking out the window, studying every pedestrian we passed. Size, speed, cash on hand.

"You running, Moatzie?"

"Yeah."

The street name remained the same — San Pablo Avenue — but green reflector signs at curbside told us that the cities were changing their identities. Short of Pinole, I U-turned south to drive back to Oakland, where the bus depot stood.

Whoop-whoop-whoop sounded from the rear. A squad car, Mars light flashing, zoomed towards us.

"Damn!" Moatzie coiled alert. His eyes slitted and his mouth tensed. "Slow and easy." he hissed. Under his jacket his hidden right hand held something. Gun or knife, I couldn't tell.

I tapped the brakes and steered the Ford towards a yellow zone. The squad car *whooped* past us, unheeding, towards Brookside Hospital.

Full a long moment Moatzie sat half-on, half-off his seat, fingers tattooing the door handle. "Keep driving." No bus ticket yet.

We reached Berkeley, where a left hand turn brought us along a residential area and across Telegraph Avenue, the gathering ground that bordered the University campus. The street people were on nightly patrol, a flurry of beards, braids, tie-dyes, leather and denims. Earrings and necklaces. Boots, sandals and bare feet. Talented or troubled, who knew?

"Rich kids," Moatzie spat.

"You got through a year of college, didn't you?"

"Lorraine kept after me. With her working and me borrowing term papers I almost had it made. All I needed was someone to go to class for me."

"Things might've been different. A degree..."

"*Ech!* You're too good for us. At your father's funeral your mother kept *nudging* everybody how you *wanted* to come."

I swerved and braked so quickly the car almost stalled. We double-parked in line behind two other double-parked cars. The take-out food pavilion was selling *falafel* sandwiches like hot cakes.

"My father died during a trial I

ad to win. He was still dead three days later. I didn't miss anything out a ceremony. Sometimes you *an't* do what you want."

Moatzie looked astonished. In the on-off neon lights his face alternated between orange and black. "Like when?"

"Like now."

A car behind us honked. Time to move forward in line. The spice mell called us all to dinner. I lipped the handbrake and pulled back into the street, surrendering my place to someone with an appetite. Neither Moatzie nor I said a word. We had waited against each other before. At the Jersey Head Swimming Pool we used to duck our heads under water, daring the other to quit first. Here, the air bubbles were invisible.

"I'm a tourist, Shelly." Moatzie spread dry lips across craggy teeth.

"To your right, the Eiffel Tower. To your left, Mount Everest. Anything else you want to visit?"

"Shelly, boy. This is your territory. Be a *lantsman* and take me home."

No! I didn't want him near Brenda. She heard my reports about the poverty, the pride, the dreams. A romantic contrast with her middle-class upbringing. Fine for courtship, useful for elections. But I never mentioned Lorraine or the rooftop. Only Moatzie knew.

"I hear you own a gorgeous

house and a gorgeous wife. *Four bathrooms!* That's how many rooms your whole apartment used to be. With such a giant place it must take days to kill all the cock-a-roaches."

"The world's changed, Moatzie."

"So who're you ashamed of? Me or your wife?"

"Brownsville's a long way off. People here think it's a town in Texas, not a Brooklyn slum. You need something, I'll try to help. Only we're not kids any more."

"Head for your cabin."

"How did you..." My head swivelled from traffic to my passenger. Chin in hand, Moatzie was staring out the side window, a man in control.

"Five years ago you showed it off to Doc Baroff. Of everybody in the whole neighborhood, you're the first one to advertise a hide-out."

"It's tiny. A small cabin on a steep hill. No running water, no electricity. We drive there to get away."

"Perfect for a week. Let's go."

The street light went green but I hesitated. Red again. I had a moment's pause.

"Ah..."

"Look, Shelly, don't make a big *megilla* about helping a friend. Do it first, then be as sorry as you want."

"What about the police?"

"The cops!" Moatzie slapped

the dashboard. "From Lorraine I'd expect a question like that. She got used to it. You will, too. Like I did when *you* had troubles."

"I owe you. And my mother liked you, Moatzie. A little wild but..."

"Hey, I'm dying and you're making up excuses for yourself. Start driving, huh?"

My calling Brenda would have worried Moatzie. I'd reach her later. Fast, easy driving carried me northeast, through the delta country and, nearly two hours later, the legendary Gold Country towns that still hope for resurrection.

I had bought seclusion in ten hillside acres beyond Two Valleys. To be alone was marvelous. On a crisp, dry evening, I could drive up the steep dirt road, bordered by wildflowers, and at our doorway wonder whether the stars or the valley lights were further away from me.

Moatzie's snores blended into the engine growls as I rolled in low gear up the final lap. My headlights pinned a jackrabbit. Furry-brown, it stood on the eucalyptus log that guarded our parking space. Beyond that hand-hewn barrier was a long drop to an ever-dry stream bed.

I flicked the lights from high to drive. The rabbit, dehypnotized, broke loose. Once he hopped to safety, I worked the car around in the restricted space, wheels against a protective bank.

"End of the line, Moatzie. Dancing girls and hot *knishes* in every room."

He yawned. Is anything uglier than an enemy's bad teeth? "These last few days, Shelly, I put in a lot of mileage. You get a chance, pick up a New York paper from last week."

"They spell your name right?"

"Clear down to the fingerprints."

I stepped out of the car, stretched and unlocked the door to our A-frame cabin. Scurrying noises — claws on wood — reminded me that no shutters, no chimney guard, no poisons would keep every animal away. Some creatures could intrude anywhere, even from the past. I held the door wide and stomped a warning before I entered. Beware the cornered beast!

From a wall hook I lifted a propane lantern. After pumping it, I turned up the wick and struck a match. The mantle flashed, an intense white light, and I held the lantern high so that we could inspect the room. Bed, table, chairs, ice chest, locked food cabinet, propane stove and fireplace. Spider webs everywhere.

Moatzie shook his head. "I been in cells better'n this."

"You will again."

Whack! He backhanded me across the cheek. "Don't joke like that."

The lantern swayed in my hand. "Save it for strangers, Moatzie."

ot people who remember when ou weren't so tough."

"You're lucky we're friends."

"What pushed you? Most of us ot through. Not big necessarily... With intelligence, and Lorraine to elp..."

"I was a sensitive boy." Moatie pantomimed elegance as he usted off a straight-backed chair nd sat down, pinky high. "That D' in civics from Miss McLaughin broke my heart."

Years ago, when I was digging n our hillside, I overturned a kull, probably Modoc Indian. ollow eye sockets and scoured bone. Death unredeemable. In Moatie's face I found the same expression.

"A bad roll, Moatie."

"My pal," he punched his open palm. "For a chance to be an expensive lawyer you gave me Lorraine. Thanks, anyway. When she was dying, spitting blood, she called a nurse over and said, 'I don't want my husband to get a nickel of my insurance money.' Shelly, I did you a bigger favor..."

"Son of a bitch!" I moved fast, but so slowly where it counts. Before I could reach him, Moatie had a revolver in his hand. Cocked, steady, with copper slugs shining from the side chambers, it trained on my chest.

"Uh-uh." He shook his head. "We're helping each other."

Frightened, I turned my back on him and walked the few steps to the table. "Then be a guest.

Look." I pointed at a salt shaker shaped like a wine cask. "We don't feed casual trespassers."

With a twist I loosened the shaker's false bottom and removed our food locker key. The heavy locker door swung open, revealing a closet full of shadowed containers dancing in my lantern light. "Canned goods, mostly. Dehydrated food for hikes."

"Every mouthful kosher. Look, Shelly, it's post time. I need money. How much can I get?"

"I have about thirty dollars..."

"Money," he screamed. "You're not buying shoelaces from a blind man."

Leaning against the locker, lantern in hand, I watched Moatie turn predator. Sweat ran from his forehead, down his puffed cheeks. As he tensed, his undersized clothing seemed ready to burst at a new bloating. The distance between us grew from eight feet to twenty-five years. Once, no longer, we had shared futures.

"Prices have gone up on Pitkin Avenue." I sighed.

He hiked the revolver to my forehead. "A few thousand would do it, Shelly. You'd make it back in a month."

"Do you really..."

"Don't worry," he mothered my frown, "it's an investment. I'd never tell the Brooklyn cops anything about what you are." Years of being alert to danger must have tipped off Moatie. Apparently I had relaxed visibly

at his demand. Instinctively, he regrouped.

"All right. You think the cops wouldn't believe me. Or wouldn't care. Maybe so. I guess," he was fishing now — "your wife knows everything about the roof..." My expression must have flickered again. Not only Brenda, but the voters.

"C'mon, Shelly. You misjudge me. I wouldn't tell her a thing. Nice, respectable lady with four bathrooms." The words were a threat, spoken reassuringly.

I wanted him within reach. *Keep those features blank!* "The water pump's out back, past the gravel, but" — *Won't he come closer?* — we keep the detachable handle here." I nodded at a bracket on the locker door. "We are not a public oasis."

"Lorraine would've loved it. Is your wife like her?"

"Sure. They both ate herring." I motioned him over. "You've got to see how this gets loose." A few dried leaves, dragged in weeks ago, cracked as he stepped nearer, across the planked floor. "See?" I hiked the lantern to eye level. The harsh propane light blinded him. "What you do is reach..."

I talked softly, soothingly, and pulled the metal handle from the bracket.

"...and up..."

The handle crashed into his forehead — *thunk!* — before he could move. He tumbled back-

wards. Like swatting a fly, I clubbed him again. Arms askew, he collapsed. His shoulder knocked down our fireplace screen; his revolver skidded to the table leg, shoving the leaves aside. With two steps I had the gun. Half-stupified, Moatzie gagged.

"What kinda tricks..."

"You never could move under the basket, Moatzie. I could fake you out any day of the week."

His left temple purpled as he pushed himself to a sitting position. The shirt buttons popped loose under the strain. "Go ahead, counsellor. Remember, killing's easy."

"Moatzie, I owe a lot, To you, to my parents. They're gone."

"And I'm here."

"In this world, you're the only way for me to pay off guilt. I'll get you to the bus station. After that..."

"Me, Lorraine and the kid. Outa your life." He leaned on the chair. "Cheaper than nightmares."

"I wish... Moatzie, you should have given me my chance with Lorraine."

"Shelly and Lorraine, Lorraine and Shelly." He laughed, a singsong of contempt. "I know you didn't get anywhere with her. It was her husband and, let's face it, I wasn't first. I wasn't even last. Some weeks I had to make an appointment. For Lorraine, the neighborhood bedspread, you still dream?"

For the third time the pump

hanle flashed. All MOatzie could do was gasp when the steel bar hit him again. He dropped on the spot, tumbling with the chair. My past lay helpless before me.

Five minutes' work and I tidied up the cabin. Still breathing, still unconscious, Moatzie lay in the parking area, next to the eucalyptus log. Beyond that log fell a precipitous gloom, a convenient void for burying memories. The crevices and underbrush would inter his body for years. Nobody climbed there. Within weeks the raccoons and insects would have stripped him to his bones and dental work.

I lifted him up. He tottered. One heave and he would plunge down the crevasse. In Brooklyn, in California, anywhere, gravity could be the answer. *Puhlopp!*

Moatzie would die, along with

the past. Scratch one thug. But I'd still owe him. On that last date with Lorraine, days before the rooftop, he took care of me. On the roof itself, nobody could have done more. I hefted his revolver. Underhanded, with a long arch, I threw the gun down into the brush and heard the distant bounce.

"Goodbye, Moatzie," I shoved him into the parking area, away from the steep drop. "*A bei gezunt*. I pay my debts." In the soft light, I counted out sixty-five cents. Two quarters, three nickels. "We're even."

I dropped the coins beside him. His breathing was slow, but regular. Hours from now, he would have to choose his own road. Whoever picked up a scraggly hitchhiker would have to answer to himself. When I was growing up we didn't have cars.

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An Unusual Story of Suspense

Marcy And The Duke

by R.C. TUTTLE

It was a great night club act — till somebody took it for real!

MY FIRST NIGHT in Marcy D'Voe's PARADISE CLUB on Utari Island, some twenty miles north of Fiji, left me gasping, and not just from the heat. As I sat at the big white Japanese piano playing my version of Fats Waller's version of *Ain't Misbehaving*. It was wall to wall Roaring Twenties.

A collection of oddly assorted tables and chairs were arranged in semiconfusion around a small dance floor. Overhead, a large fan angled out of a sagging ceiling and churned ancient tobacco smog. Four decrepit looking potted palms occupied the four corners of the room — one at my shoulder — and a faded painting of General Pershing glared down at me from a wall.

The rest of the wall space was cluttered with photos and newspaper pictures of the great, the near great and some I'd never heard of. A life-sized painting of a reclining nude hung behind the long bar, her grinning face partially obscured by a stack of

whiskey bottles.

The final touch was a large gaudy arch covered with fake flowers that formed the entrance to this tropical gin mill.

Marcy D'Voe, creator of this prohibition era set, was perched on a stool behind the cash register, grinning at her creation, giving me the sudden impression of a wizened redheaded Buddha contemplating the faithful.

There were about ten tourist couples, mostly college-age kids, sweating it out on the dance floor, and there wasn't a deodorant on the market that could have handled that situation — but then, nobody seemed to care.

Marcy suddenly hopped off the stool and came over to the piano, bouncing along as though she were twenty instead of in her mid-seventies.

"That something new you're playing?" she asked. Born in London, adult years in New York City, her accent was a curious blend of New York East Side and Piccadilly with a fascinating touch of gin rasp.

"Something from the thirties," I said. "An old timer."

Her lips tensed for an instant and her heavily made up face seemed to undergo a micro earthquake. "Thirties ain't old, kid." Her face was narrow and fine featured. Probably she had been a beauty in her youth.

I grinned at the, "kid." At that moment I was fifty-three and three quarters. "Okay. So it ain't."

Her eyes narrowed and she looked around furtively. "The Duke might come in here tonight. You watch him. He's a mean blighter — a gangster — runs the rackets here. If he tries to muscle you, let me know."

"Gangster on Utari?" Utari was about as big as Ellis Island and mostly jungle. I went into *September Song*. "You're putting me on, Marcy."

She swallowed hard, as though trying to cover up a sudden rush of emotion, then looked around frantically. Her time-ravaged face seemed to draw away from the heavy makeup for an instant. Her hand fell on my arm.

"I'm not kidding! Duke's a killer! You wait and see!" She cast a scared look toward the arch. "I try to keep him outa my place!"

I was beginning to have second thoughts about having given up that tour boat job. "Okay, Marcy — I'll see."

Her fingers tightened on my arm. "Here he comes," she

whispered in tones that reflected both horror and delight. She clutched her faded white gown and hurried back to the cash register.

I looked toward the arch and saw a tall, pockmarked man of about 75 standing there. He was wearing a 1930 tuxedo and his full head of snow-white hair was slicked tight against his head. The face was thin, ratlike, full of hate, wrinkled and pasty white against the black of the suit. He was about six feet tall, fairly erect for his age, with a body that had apparently not suffered any loss or gain in weight through the years.

Duke slowly lighted a long black cigar, glared at the grinning couples and, ignoring the greetings, walked over to the piano where he stood in silence for a moment, watching my fingers skip through the rest of *September Song*.

"You ain't bad, kid," he said finally in a heavy, gravel-laced voice that went with the suit. He blew a puff of smoke at me. "No funny stuff — stick to the music — stay away from the cops — and you do okay here." With that, he turned and went to a corner table.

This was right out of an Edward G. Robinson movie! I glanced at Louie the bartender, who had been watching me with a faint smile on his face.

Marcy came bounding over and looked at me, wide-eyed. "What'd he say? Did he try to hurt you? I'll

throw the bloody blighter out if..." She shot a look of hate in the general direction of the corner table.

"Marcy," I said patiently, convinced now that she was funny-farm material, "Forget it. He just welcomed me to the island. A sort of a welcome wagon."

A puzzled look crossed her face. "Welcome wagon? *Blimey!*" She walked off shaking her head.

A few minutes later, Louie, a chubby little Frenchman with a flowing white mustache and bald head, came over with an icy scotch and soda. He smiled and handed me the drink. "You need this — no?"

"I need this — yes." I downed about half of the drink. Then, I looked at Marcy and the Duke. "She's crazy — he's crazy. Hell, Duke went out with nickel cigars! I must be crazy to be here."

Louie grinned. "Don't be hard on them, Ron." He paused. "Marcy was a showgirl in the twenties but never made big time. As for Duke — he really was a big time gangster in Chicago in the twenties and thirties. He managed to escape from your FBI in the mid-thirties and has finally ended up here."

"Great, but what's going on?" I asked.

"Marcy has this phoney speak-easy, a real gangster, and now you to play background music. Every night they play this silly little game. For a few hours, Duke is the

tough gangster and Marcy fancied herself the star in a drama of the mob. They are harmless. It could be worse, you know." He laughed. "Marcy used to sing for the tourists — like a crow. Horrible! I managed to talk her out of that. They are both quite rich. Duke has a house on the other side of the island."

"What happens when the joint is closed?"

Louie looked solemn. "I think they both experience death for a few hours."

I glanced at Marcy, who was glaring at Duke — who was eyeing me suspiciously. "Every night? *This?*"

"But, of course, Monsieur Bronson," Louie said. "You are part of the cast now. Your role other than music man — I don't know yet." He winked. "Duke is convinced that I am a police informer."

"Are you?"

He laughed. "Who would I inform? There are no police on this island and the Suva Police only laugh at Duke." He went back to the bar.

And *what* would he inform? I went into a rinky-dinky version of *Stardust*. The old girl had dragged me off a pleasant tour boat to play background music for a corny gangster movie.

But — the scotch was good, free and plentiful. The piano was a thing of beauty and I had a nice little cottage overlooking the most

startlingly beautiful stretch of coral-covered rock-and-white sand I had ever seen. All that, plus a hefty weekly salary which I put in a Suva bank.

Big, fat and lazy as I am, I didn't swim or fish. Besides, only a fish would swim in that surf. I got into the habit of taking morning walks along the beach with Louie, who loved to fish. We became great pals. I quickly learned that he was 68, an ex-cop from Paris, France, and that he was a crime buff. He collected fact on crime and criminals as another might collect stamps or bottle tops.

Louie had retired in 1965 to live in Suva and helped Marcy on busy weekends. When she offered him a steady job, he decided to live out his life as a bartender. He had a small room off the club kitchen.

Naturally, he knew all about Duke's past. In fact, he probably knew more about Duke than Duke did. Duke was completely covered during our first walk.

"Duke a real gangster? Yes, he was. He specialized in liquor but had experience in most aspects of gangsterism — protection, numbers, gambling." Louie shrugged. "He made millions — tax-free money."

I tossed a rock into an oncoming wave. "How come I never heard of him? I've played in clubs all over the States. Never heard of a guy named Duke."

"Duke was smart. He stayed in

the background and let his partner make all the headlines. Have you heard of the Baron?"

I thought for a few seconds, then nodded. "Yeah — I was reading about him around a year ago. He died in prison. The paper said he was a broken old man."

"Duke broke him," Louie said. "You see, Duke was the silent partner and did all the dirty work — disposing of enemies, paying off the cops, pressuring those unwilling to go along. He was quite effective. He also had charge of whatever books they kept.

"In 1938, he got a tip that the FBI was going to move in, so he juggled his name out of the books, collected practically all the money and fled to South America while the Baron was living it up in Europe on a vacation. The Baron returned and stepped into a trap prepared by the FBI, had no money to hire lawyers — *c'est fini pour Monsieur le baron*. Duke spent World War Two in Rio and, after the war, came to Suva and finally here to live." Louie grinned. "Interesting."

"How do the Fiji police feel about Duke?" I asked.

"They think he's crazy — harmless — which he is. But he is rich and, as you Americans say, money talks." He baited his hooks and cast the line out into the surf. "He has no gun, doesn't bother anyone and puts on a good show for the customers."

"How about Marcy?"

"Marcy came over here after the war as the bride of a rich planter. The club is the living room of her bridal house. When her husband died in 1946, she turned her home into the club — and, I suppose, decided to remain in the thirties. Age frightens her. She and Duke gradually dropped back into that narrow world they both knew so well."

"I wonder why one of the Baron's boys haven't slipped in and knocked off Duke. Seems like it would be easy enough."

Louie nodded. "I've wondered that myself. Fishing boats, tour boats, come and go here. I suppose the more recent brand of gangster sees no gain in killing Duke — perhaps he's been forgotten."

I watched him pull in a fish.

Time slipped by fast. Back in the old days, I had enjoyed my music but there were arrangements to follow, uptight band-leaders, discipline — no real opportunity to float free on the keys. At the Paradise Club I was the band, the leader, arranger, producer — I was a free soul.

So each night I found myself — especially after three or four scotches — more and more drawn into the goofy world of Marcy and the Duke. I even found myself bristling with anger each night as Duke made his entrance and came over to warn me about not going to the cops.

I soon realized that I was playing the game for all it was worth.

One night, about a year later, I had just finished my opening scene with Duke — the cigar, the warning bit — and a couple of minutes after the Duke had settled down at his table, this young fellow in a wrinkled brown suit walked in. He appeared to be in his mid-twenties, stood around five-ten and apparently had a powerful young body under his sweat-soaked suit. His hair was ear length, brown, and a small mustache decorated his pleasant face.

Seemed like a nice kid. I grinned at him and began to mess around with an old Dorsey tune.

He returned the grin, picked up a drink at the bar and came over to the piano. His shirt was soaked and his face was a mass of Fiji sweat. "Pretty good piano." The voice was New York East Side.

I shrugged. "Thanks. I put in my time."

A chunky girl with practically nothing on walked by, catching his eye for a few seconds. He shook his head. "How do you stand it?"

"At my age," I said, "it's easy."

He twisted around to look at a slim blonde walking to the bar.

Then I saw his shoulder holster with the gun sticking out.

I must have hit a clinker, because he glanced at me with a faint smile, then turned back to

the girl, who seemed to be all legs, shoulders and midriff.

The gun threw me for a minute or so. I could think of only one reason why somebody would bring a gun into Marcy's place. I glanced at the Duke, who was glaring at his half-finished drink and chewing on a cigar.

I motioned toward the blonde at the bar. "Why don't you give her a shot? She comes in here a lot — seems friendly."

He shook his head. "I got other things on my mind." He frowned and looked toward the Duke's table. "That's the Duke?"

"Yeah." I lifted my hands off the keyboard and picked up my empty glass. "You know him?"

"In a way," he said thoughtfully. "Who's the ole biddy at the cash register?"

"Marcy. She owns the club."

He laughed. "She must be about a hundred years old. Where does the Duke live?"

"On the other side of the island."

"Does he come in this dump every night?"

"Never misses." I slid off the piano stool to my feet. "I need a drink Mr. ...?"

"Smith," he smiled. "John Smith."

I shrugged. "As good a name as any. See you around." I went over to the end of the bar, where Louie was cleaning glasses.

He smiled at me. "Why don't you make yourself up a drink, Ron.

My hands are full of soap."

"Sure." I slipped behind the bar. "Hey, Louie, I think our man with a gun has finally arrived." I poured in about three shots of scotch over some ice cubes in a glass and added some water.

I told him about Smith.

Louie frowned and his cleaning motions became slower and more deliberate. "A gun? Questions about Duke? Smith is obviously phoney. I wonder what his real name is." He dried his hands and poured a shot of brandy.

Smith was over at the cash register, talking to Marcy, who was twitching and waving her arms around like a wobbly windmill — her usual manner of talking.

Louie smiled sadly. "She is probably telling him all about Duke — his nightly schedule, exactly where he lives." He frowned. "Odd — a hit man doesn't usually announce himself. He could easily have sneaked ashore from a rented boat, shot Duke, and returned to the States before the body was found."

"Maybe he has something else in mind." The scotch tasted good.

"Perhaps." He downed his brandy and waited on a middle-aged couple. After having his picture taken with the husband, Louie returned to the sink. "I have the feeling that we will know his intentions tonight."

I nodded and went back to the piano. A few minutes later, Louie

began talking to Marcy behind the bar — obviously about Smith and his gun. And Marcy seemed to lose her — whatever kept that old body moving. She went back to the cash register and sat motionless on the stool, staring alternately at the Duke and Smith, who had taken a table near the piano.

It was a long night, but it finally ended. The customers filed out — all except Smith. He stayed at the table until the last flimsy dress had gone through the arch. Then he rose.

Duke, who had been waiting for his nightly bad-mouthing from Marcy, looked at her curiously while she stared silently at Smith. He was no ad libber. She hadn't spoken her lines, so he didn't speak his. He shrugged and stood up.

There was a shot, and a bullet whistled by him.

He cowered against the wall and looked wide-eyed at Smith, who was standing and holding the gun. "You crazy, Kid!"

Smith smiled that boyish smile of his. "Sit down, Duke." He glanced at Louie. "Frenchy, I need a bourbon and soda — and put some ice in it this time."

Marcy suddenly came to life. She leaned toward Smith, her face a mass of wrinkled rage. "You can't shoot a gun in my place!"

"Shut up, lady," Smith said with an impatient sigh. He took the drink from Louie. After a sip, he eyed the quivering Duke. "We

finally meet after all these years." He paused. "The Baron was my grandfather and his last words to me were — 'Kid, if you want your inheritance, find that double-crossing Duke. He's got all my money.'" Another sip of the bourbon. "I been looking all over for you, then one day I saw your picture in one of them travel magazines. Retired gangster lives it up in the Fiji Islands. So here I am."

Duke's mouth trembled. "Look, Kid — if it's dough you want..."

"I want," Smith said. "All of it."

There were a few seconds of silence, broken finally by Louie, who spoke in level tones. "You'll never get all that money out of Fiji and if Duke decides not to give you any, what do you plan to do then?"

"Shoot him," was the calm answer.

"What would that gain you — other than revenge for the Baron?" Louie asked. "Besides, you would never get away with it. The Fiji police are a bit old fashioned but quite effective."

"I don't think the Duke wants to be shot," Smith said. "Right, Duke?"

Duke, who had turned another shade of gray, began whining. "Kid, you can have the dough. Just leave me a little — okay?"

Smith grinned at Louie. "See?"

Louie did not look impressed. "You still can't get it out of Fiji."

"Why not? Duke gets it out of the bank. I stuff it in my suitcase."

"Suppose they search you on the plane back?" Louie asked.

"They won't find it," Smith said. "They're just looking for guns anyhow."

A look of resignation came over Louie's face and he shook his head slowly. "I guess this matter is between you and Duke."

"Who needs all that money here anyhow?" I commented — and was completely ignored by the others.

Marcy's emotions seemed to have settled down to a cold rage. She eyed Smith. "*Blimey!* Who do you think you are? Shaking us down! You ain't getting a farthing!"

Smith lighted a cigaret. "Why don't *you* stay out of it? Like the Frenchman says, it's between Duke and me. You ain't gonna lose a — farthing — and the Duke still comes in every night and makes like Al Capone."

Louie handed her a gin and ice. "Marcy, why fight it? Can you imagine what the Fiji police would say, hearing a story like this? After all the wild stories you've told them through the years?"

"Wild stories? I never told a lie in my life! I was a *star* in the old days!" She pointed a bony finger at Louie. "Whose side are you on!" Her voice had become a whistling teapot.

Smith butted his cigaret out on

the bar. "Okay. Duke, you and I are gonna catch the next boat back to Suva." He looked at Louie. "When is the next boat back?"

"There's a mail boat about four in the morning," Louie said. He frowned. "How do we know you are the Baron's grandson? Perhaps you are just a con man after Duke's money. What proof can you offer?"

Smith held up the gun. "You'll just have to take my word for it." He turned to Duke. "Let's get outa this rattrap."

The Duke followed him through the arch.

Marcy threw her glass across the room. "That little *creep!*" She then marched up the stairs.

Louie sighed. "Poor Marcy." He glanced at his watch. "Perhaps we had better follow Duke and Smith."

"Why?" I asked. "Smith won't shoot Duke — at least not until he gets the money."

"True. However, I don't know what Marcy is up to."

We went through the arch and out into a hot moonlit night. I followed Louie down the winding path to Duke's house and we soon saw them walking along. Duke's tall figure slightly bent forward and the shorter Smith striding along beside him.

"Does Marcy have a gun?" I asked.

"Yes," Louie said. "An old six shooter — similar to those used in your cowboy movies except that

this shoots real bullets. It was given to her by an old movie cowboy who visited here about fifteen years ago."

"Why would the loss of Duke's money affect her?"

"I don't know," Louie answered. "I have a hunch the idea of a shakedown on her island infuriates her."

We could see Duke's house now. It was situated in a cleared area overlooking a hundred-foot drop onto sand, jagged rocks, huge waves and foam.

Duke and Smith stopped at the gate.

A figure stepped out of the bushes nearby.

"You lousy kid!" screamed Marcy.

There was a shot and Smith fell forward to his knees. He brought his arm around as though trying to shoot back when a second shot from Marcy put him out of action. He fell forward on his face.

We ran up the path toward them.

"*Marcy!*" cried Louie. "What are you *doing?*" He knelt down and examined Smith. "You *killed* him, Marcy. Why?"

Marcy was standing next to the stricken Duke, holding the six shooter loosely in her hand. Her voice was quite calm.

"He would have shot Duke," she said. "Duke ain't got any money. He spent it all in South America before he came here. I set him up in this house and give him

an allowance."

Louie looked at her in surprise. "I'll be damned! What do you plan to do now?"

She pointed the gun at Smith's body. "Dump him over the cliff and let the sharks eat him."

Duke was standing like a demobilized robot.

Louie looked at me. "Well, Ron?"

I thought about a court trial, about having to be a witness and how crummy the kid was — and shrugged.

"I didn't see a thing." I walked down the path toward the club.

The next night, the club was full of tourists and Marcy was her old bouncy self, table hopping, telling about her days as a star — her usual routine. The Duke, immaculate in his tux, came in, lit a cigar and came over to the piano.

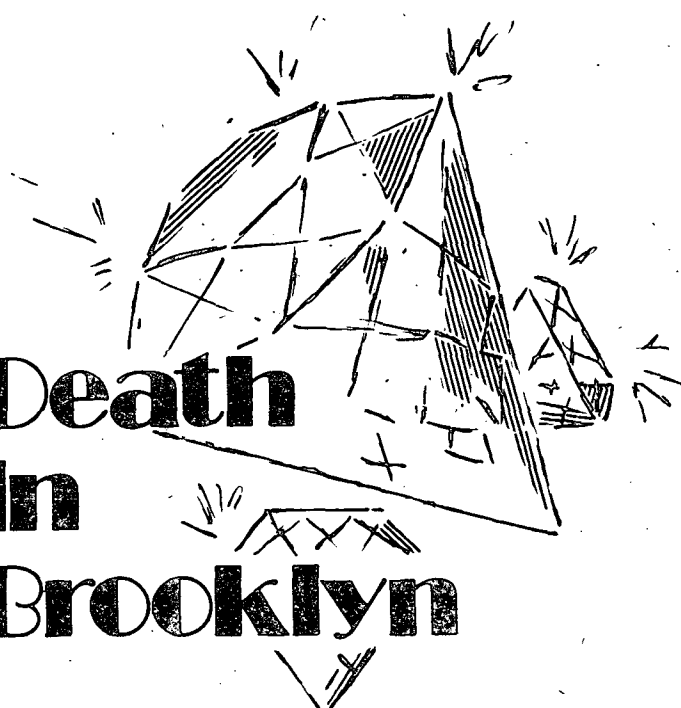
"I been watching you, Kid," he growled. "You talk too much. And if you know what's good for you, you'll stay away from the Frenchman."

Marcy ran over and looked savagely into Duke's face. "You getting rough with my boy, Duke? Knock it off or I'll have you thrown out!"

Duke's lip curled. "Ole bag," he muttered, and went to his table.

Marcy glared after him. "One of these days, I'm gonna..." She walked away.

Louie and I exchanged shrugs and went about our business.



Death In Brooklyn

by JERRY JACOBSON

The NYPD had Spencer sewed up tight — but
somebody else got the stolen diamonds.

IN A LIGHT DRIZZLE, Detective Sergeant Alex Gordon shifted out of a leg cramp behind the wheel of his unmarked and tried to pull together his fractured concentration and bring it to bear on the entrance to the Waldorf-Astoria. He never liked Park Avenue,

wouldn't be caught dead or dead-drunk there except if the lieutenant told him to pull a shift there and only then if he couldn't threaten or sweet-talk his way out of the duty.

You could feel the snobbery here a mile away. Too many

diamonds, too many pampered poodles. Too many idly rich women being chauffeured around while they cleaned out the smart shops the way Gordon cleaned out his refrigerator nonchalantly twice a year.

He was parked across 50th Street. Turley was camped in a hotel room upstairs, in the room across from Spencer's. The Waldorf-Astoria staggered its room doors so guests wouldn't get the uncomfortable feeling of being watched through an opposite peephole when they came or went.

That had been a touchy point until the management saw it their way finally and installed a peephole that would allow Turley to scan down the hallway thirty feet in both directions. The installation had been made the day after Spencer checked in and that was eight days ago.

Spencer was taking his sweet time but then he had plenty of it to kill and it was only costing him \$60 a day and that was pocket money compared to what he had to sell. The courts backed off from a telephone tap, so the scanner peephole was probably granted in compensation for the phone-tap refusal.

Gordon felt it was always good business to hit the courts with dual requests. Then, if they turned down the first, they usually gave in to the second out of a beleaguer-

ed conscience. Gordon didn't know if that was the case, but then he didn't much care. He had come to hate New York.

It was dying on its filthy feet and going flat broke, and its real estate values had fallen through rock bottom to some new, unknown low. Manhattan was becoming the worst duty in the city. A detective would get down on his knees and beg for the Bronx or Harlem or Hell's Kitchen if it came down to a choice involving Manhattan.

Nobody went out at night any more in Manhattan except cops, burglars, bad women and a few unschooled tourists who still thought New York was grandfather street peddlers, organ grinders with monkeys and Babe Ruth hitting fungoes to kids in the streets. If a cop drew duty in Central Park, he immediately began to search his mind for ways to keep his back from ever being turned.

Gordon left off damning Manhattan. His transmitter-receiver unit on the car seat next to him came to life with a voice and he picked it up.

"Gordon?" the voice asked. "You there?"

Gordon heaved a sigh. "No, Turley. I'm in Saks looking over mink jogging suits for my aire-dale."

"Spencer's coming out," said Turley, one of the precinct's non-jokers.

"He got a girl for me?"

"Girls don't like you, Gordon. You take them to dirty movies, you invite them to the East River every Spring to see the dead bodies come to the surface. You kiss with your mouth closed. Just make sure you and Canelli keep from getting your legs all tangled up when Spencer hits the street."

"I'm Nureyev and Canelli is Fred Astaire. Turley, are you kidding me?"

"Just don't blow eight days of work for us," said Turley and punched off the air.

Blow it? Nonsense! They were on top of Spencer like an army blanket. If Spencer caught a cab north, Canelli would tail him. If he went south, he was Gordon's baby. If Spencer decided to walk, suggesting he didn't have far to go to settle his business, they'd take after him on foot.

Then, they might as well forget it, because the only way a cop could tail someone successfully in Manhattan was if you had him on a chain or the followee was dropping bread crumbs.

Gordon spoke into the transmitter, "Canelli?"

"That Turley," said Canelli, who had been listening in on the conversation out of boredom. "No sense of humor. We should trade him in on a wet blanket."

"Spencer's coming out."

"I got him north, you got him south," said Canelli. "Camel-

hair topcoat, black attache case."

"You got it," Gordon told him.

"I always feel better doing a job like this when we're tailing a guy with a little class," said Canelli and punched off the air.

Spencer had class all right. It was just that his chosen line of work left a great deal to be desired. He was little better than an all-hours middleman for the city's higher class thieves. Stocks, bonds, negotiable securities, gems, cash — Spencer always seemed to know who'd ripped it off and who wanted it at a price.

He was a delivery boy in a Brooks Bros. suit and New York City was both his moveable marketplace and his ready-made hiding place. Charged dozens of times but never once convicted. Gordon wanted him like an addict wanted to get snowblind.

This time Spencer was dealing diamonds, a quarter-million worth, taken at gun-point from a broker in the diamond district six weeks earlier. The broker was ruined. He knew he was ruined, he said, because he'd never known a NYPD detective to recover anything or catch anybody. While his sanity was still his to call his own, he was going back into garments where "a guy goes broke only a little at a time."

So now Spencer had the broker's diamonds, or *didn't* have them, in the black attache case. With Spencer that was always the way it was, a lot of false runs and

red herrings. No judge found attractive the issuance of warrants every time Spencer stepped out with his attache case into the sunlight, so you had to see the merchandise and wait for the transfer.

Once the case was transferred, you kept your distance, let the middleman go his own way and follow the new guy with the case. It was a bit like being in a penny arcade shooting gallery, with the cardboard ducks going like crazy and you with only a single shot to win a furry monkey for your girl. You had to wait upon the sure thing.

Spencer came out of the hotel then, looking like a man who could afford the Greenhouse Suite, where Frank Sinatra always put up at \$800 a day so he could play billiards. Gordon watched Spencer intently, waiting for him to make a break.

Spencer unbuttoned the top of his topcoat and took a reading on the rain coming down. If he crossed the street, he was Gordon's. Gordon watched the man drop the attache case to the pavement and take out a pair of gloves, putting them on slowly.

What was *that* little visual trick supposed to mean? That the case could be left on the sidewalk momentarily, out of his grasp, because it contained nothing of immense value?

Gordon grinned and lit a

cigaret. Spencer was full of little wrinkles like that. He should have been an out-of-work actor. The case *could* be empty and Spencer *could* be bound for lunch or a brief stroll, his mind swimming with visions of false-arrest suits.

The traffic was heavy. In his rear-view mirror, Gordon picked out two cabs about a half-block back, a Metropolitan and beat-up Checker. In addition, there were five more cabs idle at the stand in front of the hotel. But Spencer seemed to be disdaining these. Instead, he reclaimed the attache case and began walking north. It looked as if he was Canelli's all the way.

But Gordon's transmitter unit said differently. "He's crossing, Gordon. Getting into the Metropolitan about twenty yards back of you."

Gordon's plans for a long lunch went out the window.

II

HE LET THE Metropolitan pass and then pulled out into traffic three cars back. The city was breaking for lunch all over. Keeping with the Metropolitan was going to be a simple matter of the luck of the flow.

Miraculously, the Metropolitan kept in sight all the way to the Avenue of the Americas, where traffic grew thinner. It moved onto Chambers, a dark street that was continually trapped in the massive

shadows of the Brooklyn Bridge. The harbor opened up in a breath-taking sweep.

So, Brooklyn it would be. Spencer appeared to be content with running up the meter while he led Gordon on yet another red herring run.

The bridge and the East River fell away as they moved onto Flatbush Avenue. This was Gordon's territory. He was born in Brooklyn not a dozen blocks from where he was now, on 7th Avenue and 39th Street. He gazed at the tops of tenements as his mind's eye picked out his own stoop.

He saw himself playing stickball in summer's sticky heat and agonizing over whether Johnny Podres would win his twenty games for the Dodgers and taking the growler to O'Bannion's on Sundays, to have it filled with beer for a quarter so his father and grandfather could bear the heat, greasing the inside of its top with butter to keep down the foam.

His father and grandfather were gone now and so was most of the old Brooklyn he knew. As Thomas Wolfe believed, only the dead knew Brooklyn and Gordon now believed it, too. Quietly, to himself, Alex Gordon said goodbye to Brooklyn.

The cab held to a straight course down Flatbush Avenue, bearing in the direction of Marine Park on Rockaway Inlet. Gordon began to seethe. There wasn't going to be any bust today, because there

wasn't going to be a transfer of gems to bust.

Spencer knew Gordon was behind him, or Turley or Canelli. Over the months, all the names and numbers of the players had been revealed, all layers of anonymity peeled away.

At King's Highway, just beyond Brooklyn College, the Metropolitan turned right. Gordon was trailing a good three hundred yards back but there were no buildings or hills to obstruct his view. It disappeared behind a belt of warehouse and Gordon speeded up.

When he turned onto King's Highway, the taxi had pulled to a stop on a soft shoulder three blocks ahead. Gordon wheeled to a small lot squared off with tarred pier pilings and there killed his engine.

Spencer was out of the cab, paying the driver through an open window. Gordon's unmarked was just a parked car now, making it nearly impossible for Spencer to tell if it had been parked there when the taxi passed the spot. Gordon knew this warehouse area.

In former years, it was a favorite spot to dump bodies. The Brooklyn Precinct ran across so many of them that a wag of a desk sergeant had renamed King's Highway "Stiff Street" in honor of all those private wipe-outs in public places. Open violence of that sort fell out of vogue, leaving this section of

King's Highway to the seagulls and the storage magnets.

There was no traffic. Gordon saw no one anywhere. It was as if he and Spencer had moved into the eye of a hurricane. Gordon gave a moment's thought to the notion of patching through to Canelli back at the hotel to haul it out to Brooklyn as his back-up.

But Canelli would only haze him the rest of his days over hollering for someone to come hold his hand on a simple surveillance and the possible arrest of a small-time crook who saw his own shadow as a threat to his well-being.

Spencer was walking down King's Highway, turning 360s every fifty feet or so to determine if he was being followed or watched. Gordon slouched down behind the wheel and sighted over the dashboard.

At a warehouse washed in an anemic coat of white paint, Spencer seemed to come to a significant halt. He glanced up at the two-story building, then at his watch and then back down the silent, empty highway. Then he disappeared onto warehouse property.

Gordon came out of the unmarked car on the run, gnawed by the thought that the pursuer was possibly being led. He crossed the roadway and took up a steady trot. It wasn't anything like his idea of becoming reacquainted with the borough of his birth.

He ran like an old lady who was a middle-aged cop and didn't know it. He wanted to forsake smoking, but there were all those coupons mounting in a cardboard carton in his bedroom. He was shooting for a sailboat, a goal only within the limits of chain-smokers.

He wondered whether he could trade in coupons on a yacht club membership, moorage fees and the endless other accoutrements which came with deciding to become a fool of that sort. He'd need wheels on the damn thing if he wanted to get it out of the city.

Faded red lettering on the warehouse told that it had once been occupied by *Ace Generators Company Industrial/Marine*. A flight of wooden stairs led to the side of the building. A door at the top was just swinging closed. Gordon had expected a car to be parked nearby. Perhaps Spencer was early or the buyer was late. Or the last laugh would again be at Gordon's expense.

The gravel of the small lot adjacent to the warehouse had recently been oiled to cut down on dust and mud. Spencer's footsteps had left an oily trail up the stairs, growing fainter near the top. From there, Gordon picked out a car moving down Flatbush Avenue in the distance, a lone speck on an otherwise barren landscape.

Gordon pulled the door open an

inch or so. He saw no one. There was a narrow hallway whose makeshift walls of plywood were sloshed with a weak wash of white paint. The hallway appeared to form the walls of offices. There were doors padlocked on rusty hasps.

Gordon had hoped for an interior with a few nooks and crannies, a hiding place or two from which he could watch the gem transfer unnoticed and unheard and then leap out to make a quick, clean arrest. It wasn't any good. The place was as barren as a handball court.

His best bet was to beat it back outside and wait for Spencer and the buyer to finish up their business and then haul them both in and sort it out back at the precinct. But it was already too late for that. Spencer's buyer even now was getting out of his car in the lot outside. The rock and the hard place. Gordon had neglected his 5 Ps — had forgotten that prior planning prevents poor performance.

III

AND THEN, INSULT was added to Gordon's injury.

"Gordon? Detective Sergeant Alex Gordon? Such shyness, Sergeant! Come on out and join the party!"

The voice was Spencer's, echoing through the emptiness of the warehouse, a little playful,

a trifle ridiculing. Sighing, Gordon went down the hallway to its end. Spencer sat about fifty feet inside the empty room on a metal folding chair, its back toward the door. The black attache case sat beside him on the dusty floor.

"You musn't think too badly of me, Sergeant Gordon. But I woke in a good mood today and recognized your people fairly falling over one another in and around the hotel. And, well, a little wild goose chase just couldn't be resisted. I do hope you'll understand."

"No harm done, Mr. Spencer," Gordon told him, trying to remain as civil as possible. "I was born and raised in Brooklyn. Let's just chalk it up as a nice little visit to the old neighborhood."

"You'd dearly like a look inside this attache case, wouldn't you? No warrant? Pity. And no sale today, either. So much taxpayers' money thrown away on surveillance and shoe leather and gasoline at today's prices."

"A bagatelle, Spencer. We know you took delivery after the heist and that a lot of people are getting anxious to complete their business. Everybody's got to come out of the woodwork sooner or later."

Spencer snatched a look at his watch. "Well, well. Getting to be lunchtime. I'm thinking of *Coquille Saint Jacques* and a nice *Chablis*. Please don't take this too hard, Sergeant Gordon, Travel is

broadening, even if the destination is only Brooklyn."

Gordon watched Spencer rise from the folding chair and stoop for the attache case. When he straightened again, a small grin danced on his lips. And then the grin began to wash away as a new expression took its place.

Alex Gordon heard something behind him, a rushing sound of footsteps closing in from the rear. He made a move for the service revolver holstered on the left side of his waist. He felt a sharp jolt just behind his right ear.

The floor beneath his feet rose, and the ceiling came down in almost perfect concert. He saw Spencer's face left hanging in mid-air without a body, simply the spectre of an expression in the midst of change as the floor flew up against Gordon's forehead and nose.

In eighteen years of police work, Gordon had been rendered unconscious only a handful of times — twice behind the wheel of his unmarked car after collisions, the rest as a result of turning his back when he had judged it perfectly safe to do so.

Some men, he imagined, took their bearings when they regained consciousness, to see if their surroundings were the same as when they left them. Others, perhaps, tried to stand; or felt for wounds or for their service revolver or their wallet. With Gordon, the first thing was always

to look at his watch. A curious quirk he supposed, when there were more important issues impending and a cop's lights were turned out. But Gordon was always bothered by how much time he had lost, how long he had been in sleep while the rest of the world was awake and going about its business.

It had to do with gaps, he imagined, gaps in time detectives had been trained and schooled to fill in. When he was nine or ten, his father asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up. Gordon had ventured that he wanted to be a policeman, that he had a notion he'd like to catch criminals.

His father had nodded at his son's chosen profession and then gave him three pieces of fatherly advice. First, he should never take a bribe because that made him no better than the criminals he was trying to catch. Second, he should never allow anyone to take his pistol because that would leave him defenseless.

Finally, he should always pay attention—to where people were because, "Son, everyone has got to be *somewhere*, unless he's dead. If you discover someone who wasn't where he said he was, you can bet your last nickel that person is guilty of something."

As Gordon thought back on that advice, he could understand why he looked at his wristwatch the instant he was returned to life. He

felt it abundantly important to know just precisely how long people's whereabouts had been unknown to him.

His wristwatch read 12:10 p.m. and he had arrived at the warehouse a minute or two before noon. He took away three minutes for his climb of the stairs and his short chat with Spencer. That left six to seven minutes of unconsciousness.

The room hadn't settled down. The floor was still of a firm mind to be the ceiling and vice versa. Gordon rose to his knees and felt carefully behind his right ear. He was bleeding but not too badly. A piece of his ear lobe had been torn by the blow and was dangling. The barren room was slowing its spin and settling into focus.

Across the room, Gordon spotted a lump of camel-hair topcoat on the floor in front of the metal chair. Spencer's head was showing just barely. It made him look like a camper just crawling from his tent at dawn. Near his left shoulder a pool of blood was widening even as Gordon stared at it. One shod foot was caught beneath the other.

Gordon spent another few seconds on his knees, waiting for his head to clear a bit more. Then he hiked himself up and walked unsteadily to the body. There was no pulse on Spencer's neck. the black attache case was nowhere to be seen.

He rolled Spencer over and

pulled back the front of the topcoat. There were two bullet holes in his stomach less than a finger's width apart, and a third directly through his heart. The first two would have killed him slowly, the third instantaneously. Spencer wasn't armed, but then he had always been a cautious, fastidious criminal.

Gordon wasn't going to find anyone fleeing the scene. Twelve minutes to retreat was as good as a year. Groggily, he went back down the narrow hallway and outside.

He paused at the top of the stairs and let his eyes sweep over the scene below, hoping to find a workman or a wino who might have witnessed Spencer's killer leaving the vicinity of the warehouses. But there were only Gordon and the vast silence.

A car had driven onto the freshly oiled gravel. Out on the pavement, a set of oily tire tracks had left their impressions on the concrete down King's Highway for about fifty yards, bold and clear where the tires first hit the pavement, then becoming dimmer until they vanished without a trace, as though by some trick of physical laws the car had disappeared into thin air.

There was also now a third set of shoeprints on the wooden staircase, perfect casts in oil at the bottom which became almost illegible a dozen steps up. Gordon went back into the warehouse.

After a brief search he found a grimed bathroom.

An angry finger had penned **DEATH TO ALL PIGS AND IMPERIALIST LACKIES!** in the dust caking the mirror. A paper towel dispenser hung precariously on one screw. There were still towels in it. Gordon pulled one out and took it with him back to Spencer's body.

The dead man had small, dainty feet. Gordon measured the bottom of one shoe, making a mark with a ballpoint pen on the paper towel where the shoe came to an end. Seven, perhaps seven-and-a-half. Gordon went back outside and down the stairs.

At the bottom he took measurements of the three sets of prints until the marked paper towel matched up with one of them. He found his own by stepping into the two remaining sets, eliminating the larger one — about a size eleven — and making a perfect fit with his own, size nine.

Spencer's killer had large feet and he had come in a car and he knew where to strike someone from behind to knock him unconscious. For the moment, that was all Gordon had to go on, that and the strong probability that one of Spencer's buyers was now in the business of taking.

IV

WITHIN TWO HOURS Spencer was down in the books as a

homicide victim and whisked off to be autopsied. Lieutenant Darling, Gordon's immediate superior, a brute of a man whose second occupation was lying in wait for people who made fun of his name, made it clear to Gordon that he wasn't the least pleased with his procedure.

"It goes down that you made a tactical error going into the building, Gordon. And that you let Spencer spot your tail. Okay, so he knows he's being watched like a split end on third-and-twenty. But you still have control over the who and when of it. Where are Canelli and Turley?"

"Still back at the hotel," Gordon said.

"Well, beat it back there and see if the three of you can put your heads together on this and come up with something besides a headache."

They were standing in the lot near the stairs, which were now a clutter of footprints where printmen and coroner's assistants and photographers had come and gone. The pavement in front of the lot was likewise a maze of intersecting arcs of oily tire tracks. Gordon might have thrown a fit over it, if the footprints and tire tracks were anything like evidence.

"The man who hit you," Lieutenant Darling said. "You

catch any kind of glimpse of him?"

"If I'd had a rear-view mirror nailed to my forehead," Gordon told him.

"Did Spencer mention a name before the guy clicked off your lights?"

"Didn't say a word. But something..."

"What?"

"The way he looked, the expression on his face. Before the guy turned up, Spencer was in a good mood, ribbing me over how he'd turned himself into a stalking horse and how I'd bought it hook, line and sinker. He was thinking about his lunch. He was going to some French place."

"And then?" said Darling.

"And then the buyer turns up and Spencer's face drops like somebody's just cut the cables in the elevator he's riding. Shock? Disbelief? Surprise? Hell, who knows? But it makes me think the third man wasn't Spencer's buyer at all, but somebody he wasn't expecting to see. If Spencer was running another false alarm, then *nobody* should have turned up to make it a threesome."

"Well, get to work on it anyway. Backtrack to Spencer's room in the Waldorf and take it from there."

Canelli wasn't in his unmarked parked in the *Passenger Load Only* zone in front of the Waldorf-Astoria. He was upstairs in the surveillance room with Turley, digging into Crab Louis and sandwiches.

"We didn't order anything for you," Turley told Gordon as he entered the room. "We think you should watch your weight as an older man."

"I don't see any jewels," said Canelli. "Must be Spencer laid another goose chase on us."

"Spencer's dead. I tailed him to Brooklyn, but somebody else was tailing me. I got coldcocked and Spencer got dead."

Both detectives stopped eating.

"Don't make jokes, Gordon," said Canelli.

"It's no joke," Gordon told him.

"Spencer's dead and somebody else got an attache case that may or may not have a quarter-million in stolen gems inside."

"*Bougades!*" cried Canelli, leaping out of his seat.

"Sonny Bougades?" said Gordon. "What about *him*?"

"Only that he's been hanging around the hotel the past couple of days," said Turley. "The coffee shop, the lobby, the registration desk."

"He checked in?" said Gordon.

"Nope. Just checking things out. Asked a clerk yesterday if Spencer was registered and in what room. Passed himself off as a steel buyer from Pittsburgh. We're wired into the desk clerks, you know, to get a line on who makes inquiries about Spencer."

Sonny Bougades was a small-time entrepreneur from the cheapest cut of cloth. At various

times in his various careers, he had run a transportation service for prostitutes out of a 1965 Cadillac, operated a hotel-key selling service, and kidnapped pedigreed dogs and cats for ransom.

These low days, he ran a place on Eighth Avenue called the Temple of Venus, where six times daily a patron could purchase a ticket to see "The Birth of Venus," the only nude ballet on Sleaze Row, as Eighth was now known to the NYPD cops. The Waldorf was so far out of his territory, he needed maps and a compass just to cross the street.

"After you tail Spencer in the Metropolitan," Canelli went on, "I see Bougades come out of the hotel and jump into the Checker coming up just behind the Metropolitan. I mean, you can't mistake him, with that fat black moustache he sports and those big, John L. Lewis eyebrows.

I catch a hole in the traffic and do a U and come up behind him about six cars back. When I get a free hand, I get on the transmitter to Turley upstairs and tell him we got a tailer tailing the tailer on Spencer.

"This is Bougades in the Checker, and I got Bougades, which makes four of us parading through Manhattan like we're remaking a Ryan O'Neal-Barbra Streisand comedy directed by Mack Sennett's kid."

"That right, Turley?" Gordon asked.

"That's the way it went off," Turley answered. "A real daisy chain. I figure I'd just sit tight and let you and Canelli nab the two of them, plus the jewels, and get all the glory, what with me already sitting on six citations and three commendations for bravery, tactical excellence, et cetera, et cetera."

"I'm on Bougades up to the Avenue of the Americas," Canelli continued. "Then this cookie truck comes bombing out of an alley and I'm cut off. By the time the trucker finishes reaming everybody out for getting in his way and puts his act back together again, Bougades' cab is sucked up in traffic and I can't see a thing of it.

"I double back to Delancey and go across the Williamsburg Bridge, then down Flushing Avenue, then down the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and back into Manhattan via the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel. All I can do is hope I pass Bougades on the highway someplace, but it's no panatella.

"I go back to the Waldorf and make a few swings up and down the streets in the vicinity, but I still come up empty. Then I call Central to get on the radio to you. I figure you could need back-up, or Spencer has reached a destination where I could meet you. Only you aren't answering your radio unit."

"That would have been about the time I was in that warehouse with Spencer," Gordon told him, painfully aware he should have been keeping in communication all along, but hadn't.

"We've broken a lot of procedure here," said Turley. "Darling isn't going to like it."

"He's already spoken his mind to me on that subject," said Gordon. "None of us should be caught in the same room with him now until we get some kind of decent handle on this thing again."

"So where do we start?" asked Canelli.

"Let's begin by getting warrants to search Spencer's room and the two apartments he kept," said Gordon. "Where are those places again, Turley?"

Turley referred to a small notebook. "One of them's on Washington Street near Battery Park. And the other is...yeh, here it is...a condominium unit in Southampton on Long Island, a place called The Dorchester House."

"Turn those places, including the room across the hall, and keep turning them until you come up with something we can use."

"Like what?" said Turley.

"Like lists," said Gordon. "A man as fastidious and time-conscious as Spencer is just the kind of guy who might be fond of keeping track of names and addresses and dates. Potential

robbery victims, sellers and buyers he was partial to dealing with. The location of a few public telephones where Spencer usually conducted his business.

"If Bougades didn't kill Spencer, then somebody close to him who knew his movements did. We put together a network of names and begin applying the heat to them, we might begin to get a few answers. But get the warrants first. Darling would dearly love to sack us a few days for blowing it so far, so from here on out we go strictly by the book."

"What are you going to be doing while we're tossing Spencer's various abodes?" Canelli wanted to know.

"I'll start with the driver of that Checker Bougades hired to make sure it really was Bougades you saw climb into it. Then I'll get a verification on its destination. And if the driver can make Bougades as his fare and he took him out to a warehouse in Brooklyn...then we come down on Bougades with a murder charge."

V

WHILE CANELLI and Turley headed off to the Hall of Justice in search of a judge, Gordon went to the Checker Taxi Cab Company's Lower Manhattan garage and from its dispatcher learned that a driver named Sol Krenwinkl picked up a fare at the Waldorf-Astoria around noon that day.

Gordon asked the dispatcher to bring Krenwinkl in from his route.

"He isn't going to like that," the dispatcher told Gordon. "He gets a lot of two-martini, long-lunch business jerks in midtown this time of day."

Gordon didn't want to be responsible for losing income a cabbie couldn't get back. "Can you get him on the radio for me?"

"Easy, Sergeant Gordon. He'll appreciate this."

The dispatcher belled Krenwinkl with his hack number. It turned out he was en route to Rockefeller Plaza with a carload of Madison Avenue admen. When he was told the circumstances, Krenwinkl said he would cooperate completely.

"Sure, I picked up a guy in front of the Waldorf about that time," Krenwinkl said to Sergeant Gordon over his radio unit. "He says I should follow this cream-colored sedan pulls out from the curb there. It's no big deal. I got this one guy bells me regular, once a week.

"He likes to follow people to see where they go, nobody he knows, just people at random. Businessmen, ladies out shopping, prostitutes. We went to Jersey a couple of times, way the hell up into Nassau County once or twice, all over. I love the weirdos. They run up big meters. What the hell!"

"The guy this afternoon," Gordon prompted.

"We follow the nothing sedari, like I said. Avenue of the Americas south, then across Brooklyn Bridge, then out Flatbush Avenue onto the flatlands, heading for Rockaway Inlet. He tells me to give the sedan some room. That's about Foster Avenue, I think.

"We give him maybe a quarter mile. The sedan makes a right turn. I pick out the Shoenbruster Cement Works water tower as a reference point, that's at King's Highway. We come to that intersection, and the guy who was driving the sedan is running on foot. We hang back until he turns in at the old Ace Generators warehouse, then I take the fare on down King's Highway."

"You pass a second taxi?" said Gordon.

"A Metropolitan, coming back the other way. I know the hack. It's Hugo Maus, and I wave to him and he waves back as he passes and he gives me this wild look, you know, like suddenly old warehouses are very popular with everyone.

"The syndicate boys liked the flatlands as a graveyard in the old days. I get the feeling the old days are coming back again, but I don't say nothin' to my fare. I don't buy no trouble. I don't see nothin', hear nothin', say nothin', you understand what I'm sayin'?"

"I understand," Gordon said.

"I'm a deaf, dumb and blind cabbie. I take the fare up to Ace Generators and let him out in the

lot. The meter is twenty-three dollars and fifty cents. He gives me a twenty and a ten and tells me to keep the change. He gets out, I back my Checker out of the lot and beat it back to Manhattan without looking over my shoulder, thankful to still be alive, you know what I mean?"

"Your fare," said Gordon. "Can you describe him?"

"Sergeant, all I see is the destination, the meter and the money. Far as I'm concerned, my fares got no faces and no names."

"Mr. Krenwinkl," said Gordon, very serious, "if it comes down to a question of your testimony in a court of law, a judge isn't going to be satisfied with that kind of attitude at all."

Krenwinkl's blase tone grew a bit more sincere. "The guy's dead?"

"No, but he may have killed someone else."

"Well, I didn't see that much of him, you understand. I catch a glimpse of him when he gets in at the hotel and again when he gets out at the warehouse, but not during the ride, not once in the rear-view mirror. He's bigger than average, maybe six-two. All I remember is this bushy moustache and thick black eyebrows."

"If you were asked, could you pick him out of a line-up?"

"Well, I don't know. Like I say, I only snatch a couple of glances at him. You put a moustache and thick eyebrows on just about any

six-foot-two guy and I probably wouldn't be able to tell him from my fare I took out to King's Highway. That's the truth, Sergeant."

"I understand your indecision, Mr. Krenwinkl. Thank you for your cooperation."

So it was Sonny Bougades, all right, but he wouldn't be convicted of murder on the strength of what Sol Krenwinkl had seen. One thing was in Gordon's favor.

Sonny Bougades had the diamonds — or, if he had no diamonds, he at least had that black attache case. If he could be tracked down fast enough, the chances were good he'd be found with either the diamonds or the case still in his possession.

It was a little before four p.m. when Gordon reached the Temple of Venus on Eighth Avenue. Wedged between two porn bookstores, it was formerly the Eros IV Theater. Its box office had been removed and replaced with white double doors flanked by two Corinthian columns.

The lobby contained only a low trestle table on which set a handled bronze urn below a sign which read CHURCH OFFERING \$3. The urn was bolted to the table. Gordon glanced down into the urn and saw it had no bottom, which meant any "offerings" went directly down into the bowels of the trestle table, whose small steel door on one side was padlocked.

A girl in a white robe sat in a

glass booth nearby. When an offering was duly given, she pressed a button which released the door lock to let the churchgoer into the seating area. A tape of Bach organ music played in the lobby.

Bougades' Temple of Venus was registered with the city as a non-profit religious organization, but a court test of its validity was pending in civil action against Bougades soon.

While Gordon stood in the lobby, a fiftyish man in a conservative business suit brushed past him and dropped some bills into the urn. A buzzer sounded and the man went hurriedly to the inner door and disappeared inside.

Gordon went to the glassed booth and showed his shield to the girl. She frowned and nodded, coming out a door on the side.

"I'm looking for Sonny Bougades."

The girl was chewing an enormous wad of gum. She was probably eighteen years old, but only by the skin of her teeth. Gordon wanted to pull up the sleeves of that white dress for a look at her arms.

"Mr. Bougades isn't here," she told Gordon. "In fact, he hasn't been in all day."

"Do you expect him in today?"

"Well, sure. I mean, he just sort of turns up. A couple times a day. To pick up the...er...offerings and to check the shows to see if they're going off on time."

"Tell you what," Gordon said. "Why don't I just pop in on him at his home? Where does Mr. Bougades live?"

The girl's mouth became more active with her chewing gum. "Well, I don't know if I should give that information out."

Gordon gave her a nice smile. "Oh, I see. Well then, let me put it this way. Suppose I run the whole troupe of you downtown, and we check to see who's been flatbacking or using lately. And then we put Mr. Bougades' escort service out of commission for a while and impound that old Caddy of his and strip it down to the frame for drug traces. Then we'll..."

"I got it written on a slip of paper," the girl said in a rush and nipped back into the booth. "He lives in the Durkee Arms, on one hundred and sixty-one Street and Melrose in the Bronx, Apartment two hundred and three."

"And one other thing."

The girl's working jaws froze.

"If I learn Sonny Bougades got a telephone call warning him of my approach, a whole lot of fire and brimstone is going to rain down on the Temple of Venus, and all its disciples, including the ones who chew bubble gum."

"Y-yes sir," came the shaker voice, properly terrified. "The telephone's the last thing on my mind. The very last."

"Good girl."

VI

THE DURKEE ARMS in the Bronx was trying hard to look like a place in Los Angeles where beach bums and potential movie starlets loll around drinking orange juice and covering their bronzing bodies with zinc oxide cream. The building was painted a soft pink and there were wrought iron flamingoes and stunted palms all over the place. If there was an uglier building on the face of the earth, Alex Gordon hadn't yet seen it.

Gordon rang six times at the door of Apartment 203 before Sonny Bougades answered. Gordon barely recognized him. He had shaved off the moustache and the black, bushy eyebrows had been trimmed drastically. He wasn't missing many tricks.

His living room wasn't anything a person would send snapshots home over. He had a few bean-bag chairs strewn around, a stereo on the floor, a vest-pocket Japanese television set, and a slab of wood on cinderblocks which served as a coffeetable.

The dishes piled atop it looked a month old, the newspapers brown around the room even older. Bougades were only a pair of faded jeans and a tangle of gold neck-chains.

"Is this social or official business?" he wanted to know.

Gordon smiled thinly. "Bou-

gades, you know I wouldn't socialize with you if we were at a party celebrating being the last two people on earth."

"Even if I brought the booze and the dip, Sergeant?"

"Like to ask you a couple of questions, Bougades."

"Certainly, Sergeant Gordon. Only I'd appreciate it if you'd be brief. I got to get down to the church and collect the afternoon's offerings and see everybody turns up for the evening shows."

"Depending upon the extent of your cooperation, Bougades, this can last a few minutes or can run into next week. When did you eschew the bushy brows and the moustache?"

"Eschew?"

"Abstain from — throw off — get rid of," Gordon said.

"Well, why didn't you say so, Sergeant? Big words give me a headache. I shaved the moustache off a couple weeks ago. And I trimmed the eyebrows yesterday."

"Sure you did, Bougades." Gordon brushed past him and went into the bathroom. It fairly reeked of two-bit shaving lotion. The sink was wet, but hospital clean.

Back in the living room, Bougades was sitting crosslegged on the floor, examining a handful of cassette tapes.

"The place smells like you just shaved," Gordon said.

Bougades looked up with vacant eyes. "Yeah. A few minutes ago, as a matter of fact."

"You always shave at four p.m.?"

"Twice a day, every day. I'm Italian. What am I going to do about that, huh? Once in the morning, once in the afternoon."

"And you didn't *just* shave off that moustache. You shaved it off *two weeks ago*."

"Now you got it."

Gordon could verify or dispute that by checking with any of the employees and part-time hookers at the Temple of Venus. But Bougades wasn't a scared kid who could be frightened out of making a few quick phone calls to set up his story.

"Where were you about noon today?" Gordon asked.

"Noon?"

A question with a question. A psychological reflex action which gave the guilty party a little breathing room in which to concoct an answer.

"Yes, *noon*, Bougades."

"Right here, grabbing my zeeks. Got up about an hour ago."

"You always sleep this late?"

"I do when I make a night of it. Took some of the girls out for a champagne breakfast after the one a.m. show last night. One hour led to another and before we knew it, it was nearly dawn. Time has a way of zooming by when you're having a good time."

"So I've heard," Gordon said. "I don't suppose anyone was here with you to verify that."

"Candide was here until about ten this morning. I sent her home in a cab and fell back into the rack. Look, Gordon, you are troubling me and my life like you think I done something bad."

"You know a guy named Thaddius Spencer?"

"Sure I know him. He deals off stolen merchandise. Comes on like some high-roller on the social register, but he's nothing but a gopher and a middleman."

"He isn't even that anymore Bougades. Somebody put a couple of bullets in him this afternoon out on Rockaway Inlet. But you wouldn't know a thing about that because you were here in bed this afternoon."

"Right, Sergeant."

"And you shaved your moustache off a couple weeks ago and not just this afternoon."

"Right again."

"You wouldn't happen to wear a size eleven street shoe would you, Bougades?"

"That's my size, yeah."

"But I would likely be wasting my time checking their soles for traces of oil, because you've had plenty of time to make their department store clean."

"What? Shoes with *what* on them?"

"And you likewise wouldn't know anything about a black attache case," said Gordon.

Sonny Bougades got up off the carpet. His face was a display of both anger and confusion, though Sonny Bougades was a street punk thoroughly capable of putting on masks.

"Look, Sergeant Gordon. You got me turning in little circles here. I don't know nothin' about *just* shaving off my moustache, or about Spencer getting shot up, or size eleven shoes with oil on them, or black attache cases!

"You want to turn my place? Go ahead. I won't even send you back downtown for a warrant. Toss it as long as you want, anything to get you off my case!"

False indignation or genuine, Gordon knew he could press Sonny Bougades no farther. A cabbie could never make him in a line-up without that moustache and Bougades had spotted the oil on his shoes from the parking lot and had cleverly disposed of the attache case as well.

The murder weapon? That was in the East River, or the Hudson, or the Harlem. Yes, Bougades had tied up all his loose ends, except for the final unloading of the diamonds to make himself a few bucks.

"Bougades, tell me the truth. You've been hanging around the Waldorf-Astoria the past few days, checking out Thaddius Spencer's movements. Come on, level with me at least on that. Curiosity isn't a crime."

"Gordon, the only thing I know about the Waldorf is when I seen it a long time ago on the late show when William Powell and Myrna Loy was staying at it and there was these killings happening all over the place. They shot it on location."

"Then, you haven't been seen there recently, asking questions about Spencer."

"I haven't been within a dozen city blocks of the Waldorf in my life."

So the surveillances were beginning all over again. Six tedious weeks babysitting Spencer and now they had to wind it back to square one and begin watching a sleazy crumb like Bougades.

Gordon turned and left Bougades' Little Hollywood apartment without an apology or a backward glance. He didn't deserve either.

VII

THE BULLETS PULLED from the body of Thaddius Spencer were .38 caliber. That nicely narrowed the possibilities to roughly 20,000 pistols, omitting entirely another 5,000 .38s whose owners preferred to remain anonymous by foregoing registration. Without an actual or suspected murder weapon, those two pieces of lead they had would continue to reside in that evidence envelope until they dissolved into dust.

They fell into one slender bit of good fortune. At Spencer's condominium on Long Island, Canelli turned up two lists. One held at least a dozen Manhattan locations where Spencer transacted business via public telephone.

The other contained the names and telephone numbers of nine individuals who were very interested in purchasing from the marketplaces on the shady side of the street. Six were known to Gordon, but the good news was that they now had the names of three brand new buyers of ill-gotten goods.

Canelli had torn the pages from notebooks, but had neglected to bring the books themselves. It was a small deviation from procedure Gordon couldn't really fault him on.

"So where does all this leave us?" Canelli said, as the trio of them sipped coffee in Oscar's, the Waldorf's coffee shop named after the hotel's first maitre d'. Close by, high tea was being served in the elegant Peacock Alley, a fancy area where a cop couldn't get a table in the coat-room unless he was at least an assistant chief.

"First, we break up the surveillance here," said Gordon. "You and Turley take care of it. Collect Spencer's personal effects, take them downtown and go over them good."

"Suit linings, luggage walls, the works?" said Turley.

"The works. Anybody come up with a next of kin for Spencer yet?"

"His file doesn't show any," said Canelli. "And he's used at least three aliases that we know of. But you can be sure somebody is going to come out of the wood-work soon enough. He's got expensive stuff out at his place on Long Island and he's probably got bank accounts someplace in the city under one or more of those aliases."

"Okay," said Gordon. "Go through his stuff from the hotel room upstairs. Hold out anything suspicious, sack up the rest and tag it and leave it with Property Section. That's all we can do."

Gordon waved at a waitress for more coffee. He could read her frown halfway across the room.

"So we set up on Bougades now?" asked Canelli.

Gordon nodded. "His Beach Blanket Bingo place out in the Bronx, the bogus church on Eighth, his girl's place in the Village. Candide Wyler's her name."

"Darling isn't going to like it," said Turley. "We've run up vouchers here that would choke a horse. And we came up empty and got a guy snuffed."

"This will be street surveillance," said Gordon. "All that comes out of the taxpayer's pocket is wages. Don't forget, we still got

diamonds floating around out there, plus a killer and a murder weapon. We could still land on our feet."

"Or Darling could land on our heads," added Canelli.

That wasn't a thought Gordon wanted to entertain just then. Darling, when a situation grew complicated or protracted, could deflect responsibility from himself in the direction of his subordinates. Gordon didn't care much for his lack of understanding or the cute ways he had of dancing around responsibility.

"Let *me* handle Lieutenant Darling," Gordon told them both now. "If we dog this one and it turns out all right, Darling knows he gets a bigger gold star for it than we do."

The waitress was diplomatically avoiding them, hoping they'd leave and return the coffee shop its good name. They didn't like cops and yet they knew they couldn't live in peace and safety without them.

Gordon would never be able to figure that one out. He reached for the check without opposition. Canelli and Turley, when it came to picking up tabs, had the slowest hands in the East.

He left Canelli and Turley to take care of the shutting down of the surveillance and the examination of Spencer's belongings and went home. He lived in Great Neck, in a rented Tudor flung far enough from Manhattan to give

him a sense of not being a city-dweller during those few, rare hours when he wasn't working.

His wife still had the house in New Rochelle, part of the spoils of divorce Gordon didn't begrudge her. She had paid a heavy price for being a cop's wife and, to Gordon's way of thinking, the house and the good car and the postage-stamp piece of undeveloped property upstate still left her short-changed.

The sun was going down when he reached home. Manhasset Bay, a mile or so from his back porch, was growing to a black blotch. He took a beer out back, plopped down with it in the creaking wicker chair and began to make some reason out of Thaddius Spencer's death.

Without a doubt, there had been gems in the black attache case and Spencer's killer had known it. His murderer would not have moved himself into that category over a case which was empty. Spencer had to be killed because he was the only witness to the theft.

Why had Spencer's face registered such shock at the sight of the intruder at the warehouse? Because he had expected *no one to intrude but Gordon*, because it was another dry run? Possibly. Or because his killer was someone he had least expected? Again, possibly.

Was Spencer's murderer Sonny Bougades? That was a possibility growing less likely each time

Gordon thought about it. They were criminals at opposite poles. Spencer was a sophisticate, Bougades a little weasel who dealt in prostitutes and porno houses.

It was likely that Spencer didn't even *know* Bougades, had never seen him or heard his name spoken in his own circles. Bougades might have been telling the truth when he professed to have no connection with Spencer.

In Gordon's mind, Bougades was fading from the picture. Whoever murdered Spencer had to be close enough to him and his movements to know beyond a doubt this one was not a dry run, that Spencer was going to have his little laugh with Gordon at the warehouse, see him go off in frustration, then deal the diamonds quickly while Gordon's back was turned, probably within an hour or two of the wild goose chase out to King's Highway.

So the ultimate question was — could Bougades be that meticulous and did he have that much free time to keep on Spencer's tail until he finally picked up the gems? That was a definite no.

Bougades' head was in a whirl with his sleazy enterprises. He had neither the time, the ability, nor the inclination to stalk Spencer for those diamonds. He had been telling Gordon the truth right down the line.

Gordon had just wiped his prime suspect from the slate. He went for another beer and returned to

the wicker chair. The bay was completely dark now and a cold breeze was moving in. He should have gone for a sweater but he really didn't give a damn.

He had fashioned out of logic his own dead end and he wasn't too pleased with himself over that. Putting an elaborate surveillance on Bougades now would be a fruitless waste of time, money and manpower.

What he blamed himself for most was his own stupidity. All along, he had tried to shoehorn Sonny Bougades into the role of a killer and a thief, ignoring any other possibilities. Then who *had* been in that Checker cab which had followed Gordon out to Brooklyn?

Someone with bushy eyebrows and a full moustache, but not Sonny Bougades. In fact, who had brought up Bougades' name as a suspect in the first place?

Gordon felt his heart leap. It had been Canelli's suggestion.

When the tiny pieces began to fall into place, Gordon's stomach soured a little more. The murder weapon had been a .38 caliber, a police weapon. And there was no hotel registration clerk at the Waldorf being bothered by Sonny Bougades, because Bougades had been telling the truth when he said he had never been within blocks of the Waldorf. That had been Canelli's fabrication all along.

Gordon went back inside and closed the sliding glass doors

against the cold. As senior man on the surveillance, Gordon had Canelli's daily reports on their stake-out, as well as Turley's paperwork. But it wasn't Turley's he was interested in.

He got a third beer, sorted out the reports in the dining room and settled over those written by Canelli. An hour later, he had made the connection, using Canelli's mileage and time charts. Gordon didn't like New York City any longer. But he still knew it blindfolded better than any cop active, retired or dead.

A LITTLE AFTER seven p.m. Gordon called the precinct house and the desk sergeant transferred his call to the property room. Hanslick was the night property sergeant, a lonely man who rarely got a phone call from anyone. Before he could bite off Gordon's ear, Gordon asked who else besides Hanslick was down there.

"Just your boys, Gordon. Canelli and Turley. They're going over the stuff off that guy who got stiffed out at the warehouses today."

"Put Turley on the line."

Gordon spoke with Turley briefly and then asked to speak with Canelli.

Canelli, when he came on the line, spoke in the weary tone of a man who'd just put in a long day. "Yeah, Gordon."

"You guys turning anything down there?" Gordon asked.

"Lint and loose change," was Canelli's tired reply. "We'd do better tearing apart Spencer's digs out on Long Island, or the place he keeps in Battery Park."

"Never mind all that for now. I've got a couple fresh ideas on this killing I'd like to talk over with you. Can you drop out to my place, Canelli?"

"Now? Way the hell out to Great Neck?"

"It could break this thing wide open," Gordon told him.

"You want me to bring Turley?"

"No, he's the junior man. Let him finish sorting out Spencer's effects."

"I'll be out in about a half-hour."

"See you then." Gordon put up the phone.

When Vince Canelli arrived, Gordon met him at the door with a cold beer. Canelli's eyes seemed to fight past Gordon's to some indeterminate point beyond Gordon's shoulder.

"A cold beer. The mind boggles, Alex. You and me and Turley are the stingiest guys on earth!"

"Call it a moment of weakness," Gordon told him.

Canelli had some trouble choosing a seat to sit in. He looked this way and that, finally picking out one of Gordon's ratty armchairs. He perched on its edge like a man about to fall from the edge of a cliff.

"These new developments," he said uneasily. "What have we got going for us?"

"A few things," Gordon told him, sitting on the divan which was directly across from Canelli.

"So name a couple."

"It's tough beginning," Gordon said. "There are so many. But let's start with these time and mileage logs."

"Whose?"

"Yours."

Canelli brought his beer can to his lips. For a man who loved beer, it was the gesture of a novice. Some of the liquid spilled down his chin.

"So, Alex, what have we got going for us?"

"Time and mileage, Vince. Over six weeks of surveillance on Thaddius Spencer."

"That's going to nail Sonny Bougades? I haven't been dogging *Bougades*. I've been dogging *Spencer*."

"I had to spend some time before I found the consistencies, Vince."

"Consistencies? What consistencies?"

"The constant trips Spencer made from the hotel at around nine a.m. every other day," Gordon said.

"So?"

"Each time, he grabbed a taxi at the stand outside the hotel and headed north."

"So what's the tactical prob-

lem?" Canelli said. "I take him north, you take him south. It's been that way for six weeks."

"You see, Canelli, that's just the rub. The mileage always turns up 3.4 miles."

Canelli was having trouble keeping the beer bottle quiet in his hands. "It's in my reports there, Alex. Wild goose chases, all of them. Spencer drives around a few minutes and then comes back to the hotel. Every other morning, nine a.m. sharp. Can I help it if the guy's habitual?"

"But always 1.7 miles out and 1.7 miles back, Canelli? I know this town, buddy. I was born into it across the river and wandered Manhattan as a kid and spent half my crummy cop's life here. It's the bus depot, Canelli. Can't be anyplace else."

Canelli's eyes flew around in their sockets looking for a way out, a way to run, a way to keep from meeting Gordon's gaze.

"The forty-eight hours wasn't all that hard to figure, Vince, once I had the trips nailed to the bus depot. Spencer had a forty-eight hour locker there, so he had to move the diamonds to a new locker every two days until he was ready to deal with a buyer. Only you and Spencer knew when those jewels left the lockers and went into that black attache case for a genuine buy."

"I could use another beer, Alex." Canelli spoke in a wavering tone.

"You got it, pal." Gordon's kitchen was just off the front hallway. Canelli wasn't going anywhere.

He accepted his beer with head and eyes held down.

"You want me to wrap it up, Vince?" Gordon said.

"You got the floor, hotshot."

"You picked out Sonny Bougades because he was available and because he was a small-time hood you could hang it on. And because the last time you saw him he was sporting that bush of a moustache and those fat, black eyebrows."

Canelli wasn't responding. He simply sipped at his beer, waiting for the second shoe to hit the floor.

"Turley could never see your movements from his room in the Waldorf, not if he's on the transmitter with you. He couldn't be in two places at the same time, a physical impossibility you banked on."

"Go on, pal. You're doing fine."

"It wasn't Bougades who flagged that Checker this morning, it was you. When I took out after Spencer, you called up to Turley to tell him Bougades had hopped the Checker and you were following. Then you pasted on the phony eyebrows and moustache, beat it across the street and jumped into Sol Krenwinkl's Checker.

"From there on out to Brook-

lyn, you had clear sailing. All you had to do was keep your distance behind me in the unmarked until we all arrived at Spencer's destination, Ace Generators.

"You cold-cock me, ice Spencer so he can't identify you and, head for your own car parked someplace along King's Highway. Hell, you've got ten or twelve minutes to work with and you've got Spencer's diamonds. You're biting into a piece of cake."

Canelli lolled back in his chair, affecting invulnerability, but the bravado wasn't washing.

"You brought back the pages from Spencer's notebooks on his phone booth locations and his prospective buyers," Gordon went on. "But you didn't bring back the notebooks *themselves*. That bothered me, but not enough to take hard notice of it until I discarded Sonny Bougades as a suspect.

"Of course you had those diamonds, Vince. You turned in a short list to me to make it look as if you'd done a thorough job, but you kept a page of names for yourself. You wear elevens, don't you Vince? Don't you think we'll find traces of oil in the unmarked car or your own sedan, even on your carpets?"

"We'll even find the shoes themselves and we'll match those two slugs we took out of Spencer to the riflings of your own service revolver. Too much begins to fit, Vince, far too much. I'm sorry."

Gordon could tell by his eyes that Canelli was beginning to create new distance between them, so the drawn service revolver was scarcely a shock to him.

"So you have this wonderful hideaway in Great Neck, Gordon. You pulled the pin on your marriage and landed on your feet and you got no encumbrances. Well, Gordon, I got two daughters who want to go to Smith College or die and a boy whose first choice is Harvard and he ain't listing any seconds or thirds.

"I can't breathe over all that, pal. I try to catch a breath now and then, but I'm choking to death over my family's ambitions. Linda I won't even bring into the picture, never mind the kind of moon *she* wants.

"So I went crazy and iced Spencer, a two-bit dandy creep criminal who belongs in an unmarked grave, who no one's going to remember on Memorial Day except me, because he's my benefactor to give me a little room to breathe!"

Gordon kept his seat as Canelli rose from his and began to sidle toward the door.

"You should know that Turley's out there," Alex Gordon said, quietly. "And a couple of helpers. You set one foot outside that door, and three people are going to be putting pieces of you in paper sacks."

All the hope drained from

Canelli's face. "You took even *that* breathing room from me, right, Gordon? You sucked me here and you left me nothing."

"No," said Gordon. "You sucked yourself here when you bought the program with Spencer."

Canelli, after showing Gordon a long, fugitive look, broke for the rear of the house. Gordon watched him pull back the sliding doors in the dining room and plunge out onto the back porch to disappear in the darkness.

Gordon went out front and let in Turley and the two patrolmen.

"Where is he?" Turley said.

"Out on the back porch."

"What's he doing there?"

"Trying to breathe," Gordon said. "It's a natural conditioned reflex."

"He going to jump?"

"Turley, it's only nine feet. All he'll break is an ankle. Give him a few minutes and then take him downtown and book him for Spencer's killing."

Gordon took off his shoes and socks, somehow found the bedroom and poured himself into bed. He wasn't going to lose a lot of sleep over it. Cops went bad all the time.

But he did lose sleep over it, an entire night of it, until dawn came again, so he got up for a look at it and thought, still half-awake and half-asleep, about how many people in Brooklyn had died during the night.

Too Much At Stake

by D.C. POYER

Merida Colson's murder was a well plotted crime, if only her murderer had left well enough alone.

I DON'T REALLY KNOW how to tell this story.

Harry will, of course. Harry will start the whole thing off with something dramatic — like the murder of the lonely brunette. But then, that's Harry's trade. He's a writer, and he's supposed to be good at it.

Maybe too good.

My name is Baker, H. James Baker, and I'm an attorney here in Raymondsville. I'm in my late forties, and I've practiced here for twenty years. Nothing fancy, nothing to make the front page of the *Gazette*.

I do wills, an occasional suit, once in a while some corporate work for a local business. You see, there's very little crime around Raymondsville. It's a small town, and I fit in — a little more ambitious than most here, but isn't that only natural?

Harry didn't fit in at all.

He was new in town, Harry was. The first I knew of him was the day when, walking through the building to my Main Street front office, I saw a grimy little card stuck on the door of the little

office — apartment that opens to the rear of the building. I stopped to read it.

H. SPRECKLER, *Free Lance*, was all it said.

I thought for a moment. He must have moved in the week before, when I was up at the county seat at campaign headquarters. I was still behind in the race for DA, in spite of all I could do. My party isn't too popular in Raymondsville.

I decided to stop in, make H. Spreckler's acquaintance, and maybe win myself a vote for district attorney at the same time.

"Come in," said a high-pitched voice in answer to my knock. I opened the door and stepped inside.

"Hello. I'm in the office down the hall. Jim Baker's the name."

"Harry Spreckler." He didn't rise from behind the desk as he extended his hand. His handshake was surprisingly strong. "Won't you have a seat, Mr. Baker?"

"Jim, please. We're neighbors, after all."

I cleared a pile of magazines from an area of the worn leather

sofa and sat down, smiling to put him at his ease, but studying him at the same time.

Harry Spreckler looked like his name. Thin, gangly, nervous, late forties, like me. Sandy hair, not receding, but just getting thin. He was leaning back in his chair, away from the battered manual typewriter, and was rubbing his watery eyes as if they hurt.

I looked around the room. It was hard to believe he had moved in only the week before. It looked as if he had been there for years. Piles of newspapers and magazines, tied with twine, were stacked in the corners. Balls of crumpled paper around a trash can a few feet from the scarred wooden desk showed that he had a lousy aim.

A hinged filing cabinet, sand-colored paint peeling from it, stood near the door that led into the efficiency apartment behind the office. A few items of bric-a-brac shared the desktop with the typewriter. A few mounted photos, a cup of sharpened pencils, a violet military decoration in a transparent plastic cube.

"What business are you in, Jim?" he said, taking his hands away from his eyes and squinting at me.

"Law. I'm an attorney."

"Really? What do they need lawyers for in this town?"

I didn't like the tone Spreckler used, but he had a vote, so I over-looked it. "You must be from the

City, then. Well, law here is a lot different, that's true. Generally not much crime, not much at all. right now I'm busy running for the office of District Attorney. The election is next week."

"Oh."

"And what's your line, Harry?"

"I'm a writer."

"Is that so? What kind of things do you write?"

He warmed up a bit at my interest and told me about it at some length. Seems that he wrote for the mystery magazines, the crime and suspense market, as he called it. He named some magazines. I didn't recognize any of them, but then, I don't care for that sort of stuff.

"I'm at it full time, under three different names — but it's not very lucrative. It's hard for me to stay above water, frankly. But I saved up a little. Enough to come out here."

"But just what are you out here for?" I said. "Sorry, I don't mean to intrude, but —"

"Oh, I understand. I came here to get away from all the noise and bustle of the City. I wanted to try a novel — a detective novel," he said.

"It's generally pretty tame here."

"Generally," he said. "But in a way, the City seems almost to have — followed me out here."

"Merida Colson, you mean."

"Yes. It's a very odd, very interesting crime, in its way."

"It sure is," I agreed. "It's certainly set the county on its ear. There's never been a crime around here before like that."

"Say, Jim. You're a lawyer, and running for DA too, hm? You must know quite a bit about the Colson case. Things that aren't in the paper. Would you mind telling me what you know about it? Just for my own satisfaction?"

He produced a small tape recorder and put in on the desk in front of me. He pressed a button.

"Not at all," I smiled. "But I don't have any inside information, I'm afraid. Just what the *Gazette* carried, that and local talk. But I'll be glad to tell you what I know. You'll use my name if you write something about it, won't you? B-K-E-R — H. James. Well.

"The crime was — interesting, as you said. It was discovered Wednesday of last week, when two boys shooting twenty-two's in the woods stumbled across the body. Recently dead, fully clothed, quarter mile from the nearest road, through heavy underbrush and scrub second-growth pines. No path.

"When Chief Lane investigated, he found almost nothing in the way of leads. No signs as to how she got there. No clue as to why Miss Colson was killed. She hadn't been assaulted as far as the coroner could tell, and her handbag — with forty dollars still in it — was found back at the highway.

"The other girls at the Bee Hive, the club where she worked, said that she was going to hitchhike home because her car had broken down a few weeks before and she couldn't afford to have it fixed."

"Did you know the woman?"

"Vaguely. I have a drink there sometimes. She was a tall brunette, a little cheap-looking to my tastes, though *de mortuus nil nisi bonum*, as we lawyers say — speak no ill of the dead. It's too bad, of course."

"Um," said Spreckler non-committally. "Well. An interesting case. Almost like a piece of fiction. Especially the way she was killed — a single bullet, with the shell case found nearby."

"I hadn't heard that," I said.

"That's the strangest part of the crime. It was a case from a 7.62mm Tokarev."

"So?"

"So — that cartridge was fired by a Russian pistol that was almost exclusively used by the Chinese Communists in the fifties."

"Odd you should know something like that," I said. Then, belatedly, I recognized the decoration in the plastic cube. "Say, that medal. Isn't that —"

"A Purple Heart, yes. Korea."

"You too, eh? I was in the Seventh, up north."

"You don't say!" he said, his eyes lighting up. "Isn't that a coincidence! I was with the

Fightin' First. We held your left flank when the Chinks attacked. Remember?"

"Damn right I do." I grinned. "Yeah, I guess you'd remember a Chinese gun all right. That freezing December. I'll never forget it. They were all over us, the bugles, the screaming."

"Yes," he said, the smile fading, as if he were back in the frozen foxholes we dug at Chosen Reservoir. "Well. That sure calls for a drink!" He pulled a bottle of brandy from the desk and set us up in two paper cups.

It was lousy brandy. He must be hard up, all right. It was when I glanced over the rim of the cup at him, a thin and alone-looking stranger, that it hit me.

My hand trembled a bit as I set the cup down. "That really hit the spot, Harry. That's good liquor. Well..."

"Got to leave? We were just starting to get acquainted."

"I really have to be going. Business, you know."

"Well, hell, stop in any time, Jim. It gets lonely in here."

"Thanks. I will. So long, now."

I closed the door behind me and stood in the hall for a moment, pulling at my lip in thought. Then I turned down the corridor to my office.

"Any messages?" I asked Rita, my secretary.

"Mr. Baker! Good morning. Yes — a few." She filled me in, and I looked through a few letters.

"By the way, do you know the new fellow down the hall — this Spreckler fellow?"

"Well, not very well, sir. He asked me to help him move in a few boxes, and I did, but I haven't seen him out of his office since then."

I closed the door on her and sat down at my desk. After spending several minutes in thought, I made one phone call, and then settled down to several hours of campaign work, writing the speech I would give the day before the election.

I left my office late, about seven o'clock, and drove straight to the Bee Hive, passing on the way the stretch of wooden road where Merida Colson had met her end. I looked out into the darkness and shivered.

Chief Lane was sitting at a table near the bar when I pushed through the door. The Bee Hive was almost empty. It was a small place, clean, not at all bad for a local joint, with a band on Friday nights and booths for couples along the walls.

Tonight it was quieter than usual. A weeknight, and the ghost of Merida Colson may have had something to do with it. The little blonde waitress seemed depressed, silent, a little frightened as she brought Lane and me two draft beers.

Lane, a sturdily-built, balding cop of the old school, leaned back to look at me. "Well, Jim. What is on your mind?"

"Maybe something. Maybe nothing. What progress in the Colson case, Chief?"

He frowned. "Well — normally I don't discuss cases in progress, Jim. But seeing as how you might be my boss next week, the way this case is upsetting people..."

I nodded, waiting. He frowned at his beer again and then leaned forward. "Frankly, Jim, we haven't got a damned thing to go on. Not one single lead. This babe had friends, sometimes they went home with her, but she wasn't involved in anything that could make jealousy a motive. We turned up an ex-husband, but he's living in Nevada, and his alibi was checked out by the cops out there. Solid. I'm stumped, damn it, and the political pressure is terrific."

"People want to feel safe," I said.

"Yeah. Well, this has got them feeling mighty *unsafe*, and that makes the higher-ups mighty jumpy. Till last week, they thought they had this election sewed up. Now people are asking questions, wondering why all the cops in the county can't do in eight days what the cops on TV all do in half an hour, wondering who the killer is, wondering if maybe it isn't time for a change.

"Those speeches of yours — about 'dry rot' in the Department and the DA's office — it seems to be hitting home. You're wrong about the Department — but I'll say this, you're a damned good

politician." He straightened in his chair and finished the speech with a swig of beer and a penetrating look at me.

I nodded understandingly. "Well, I know one thing: I know *you're* doing your best, Chief. I don't think any new appointee could do as good a job as an old hand like you."

He gave me a grateful glance, and the tension in his big body eased perceptibly. "Don't tell our worthy incumbent I said so, Jim. But you might make an okay DA after all. Thanks."

"Do you think someone in town did it, Chief?"

I'd hate to think that, Jim, I really would. I don't know anyone in Raymondsville who could do such a thing. It's as if some City criminal, someone who lived with that sort of sickness, came here and..."

"Someone passing through, then? Picked her up, hitchhiking home and stopped further along the road?"

"We could go with that theory, Jim, except that the road doesn't go through. You know how it leaves town, winds around and eventually goes right back. So the 'passing out-of-town motorist' idea stinks. Whoever did it drove back there with that idea in mind."

"So it narrows down to someone in town."

"Looks that way," he said morosely.

I rose to go. "Well, thanks, Chief. If I'm elected I'll remember this little talk."

He glanced up and half-grinned. "Frankly, Jim, I still hope you lose. But it looks like if you don't, we can find a way to get along."

I smiled, tossed a fiver on the table and turned to leave, then stopped. "By the way, Chief. I wanted to ask you about something else."

"Sure, Jim."

"I want to borrow a gun."

His eyebrows rose. "A gun? What for?"

"Self-protection. I'm getting to be a public figure. It would be good to have one."

It sounded weak, and Lane must have thought so, too. He looked away from me, unwilling, I could see, to turn down a man who might become his boss, but unwilling to let me have the gun, either.

"I'll sign a receipt if you like," I said, twisting the screws.

"Oh, all right," he said, not very happily. Glancing around the empty room, he slid a snub-nosed .38 S&W from under his coat and handed it over. I dropped it into a coat pocket.

"Sign this," he said, scribbling a few words on a page of his notebook. I read it and signed it. It was a straightforward receipt.

"Thanks, Chief," I said. "See you at the polls!"

"Yeah," he grunted, looking

after me with a strange expression. I waved so long and headed for the door.

The lights in the Bee Hive had been dim, but even so the blackness of the night seemed absolute. No moon, no stars, the parking lot empty. I groped my way to my car, slid inside and headed back toward town, seeing at the corners of the cones of headlight glare the creeping darkness of the woods along the road. I wrestled my thoughts back to the Colson case, trying to look at the situation as an old pro like Lane would see it.

Merida's murder had been a depraved and inexplicable crime, out of all character for a quiet little town far from the violence-filled City. Who would be suspected? At whom would the finger of suspicion point?

Who but an outsider, someone from the City, a man who made his living from crime? One who knew all the tricks of covering his tracks, of leaving no clue? One who lived alone, moved and lived almost secretly, keeping to himself? And a man accustomed to violence. You don't get Purple Hearts in the rear echelon, where, in point of hard fact, I had spent all of my two months in Korea.

In short — to Harry Spreckler.

I parked my car two blocks away from the office and walked along the edge of the sidewalk, looking at each parked car as I passed. I found what I was looking for almost immediately. It was a beige

Nova, five years old, with a set of City stickers. I looked inside. The rear seat was filled with boxes of magazines, tied with twine. I strained to get a look at them. They were mystery magazines.

It was Spreckler's car, all right.

The light shone under the door as I paused outside of his office, feeling Lane's revolver heavy in my pocket. I looked at my watch. Two a.m. and he was still up. I could hear the typewriter clacking loudly in the stillness of the building. I walked softly to my own office, let myself in. I wanted something from my office safe. It took only a minute.

I knocked twice at his door.

"Come on in." The rattle of the manual did not pause.

I let myself in. He was at the typewriter and all the lights in the room were blazing. He had on dark glasses and an eyeshade. The brandy bottle was still on his desk, but now it was empty. He glanced up as I came in and nodded toward the sofa.

"Hello, Jim. Be just a moment. Finish this page."

I sat, half amused, and watched him. He was fast. Pretty soon he slipped the sheet out and laid it on a pile to his left and sat back and looked at me, pushing the shade back to rub at his eyes.

"I expected you, Jim."

"Expected me?"

"Yes. I thought you might stop by tonight, so I stayed up." He looked at the bottle ruefully.

"Unfortunately, I can't offer you a drink."

"Looks like you're keeping busy."

"That I am. I'm working on a very interesting story."

"I thought it was a novel."

"I'll get back to that tomorrow. This is a short. About a small-town lawyer who wants to be district attorney."

I tightened up all over. "What?" I said, putting my hand in my pocket.

Little crinkles of amusement showed around Harry's reddened eyes. "I said, it's about a lawyer. Who wants to be D.A. so bad he'll kill for it."

This was too much, I thought. The guy was either kidding me or had somehow, fantastically, caught on to what I planned to do and was trying to rattle me.

"Are you accusing me of something, Spreckler?"

He laughed, showing his gums. "Yeah, I am. Of murder, Jim."

"What? You're dreaming!"

I watched him narrowly. The slightest move toward his drawer and he would die. It would be self-defense in any court. Especially when they checked the gun they would find in his desk against the bullet from the corpse of Merida Colson.

"Am I? It wasn't hard, Jim."

He tapped a thick book near him. "Like something out of a plot book. Something very complicated. We start with an unex-

plained murder." He paused to light a cigaret.

"Hurry up," I said.

He finished lighting it and glanced up at me shrewdly, pitching the match toward the wastebasket. It missed. "Murder's got to have a motive, old man. Essential in a well-constructed story. But in this case there didn't seem to be any. Girl wasn't assaulted — autopsy proved that. Her purse was untouched, as you yourself told me."

He tapped the tape recorder. "So neither rape nor robbery was the motive. It wasn't revenge — no one hated Merida Colson — nor was it drugs or blackmail or anything else I could find by talking to her boss or her boy friends." He nodded toward the telephone.

"You've been busy," I said.

He nodded. "Yes. I'm a curious kind of person."

"Curiosity killed the cat," I said.

He ignored my remark and looked dreamily across the shabby little room. "So, who could have gained by her death? That puzzled me, intrigued me. It wasn't anybody in the local power structure. The paper and the churches are howling for action. The people in office are worried. It makes them look fumbling and inefficient.

"In fact, the Colson case may just lose them the election. If not the whole thing, at least the D.A.'s spot."

He glanced at me through the

smoke from his cigarette. "And in that fact, Jim, I found my first kind of a motive."

My mouth was dry, but I got out the words. "Go on."

"It was clever, Jim, That was a giveaway, too. Far too complicated and clever for the average criminal, who tends in real life to be a rather unimaginative sort. No tire marks. No footprints. No witnesses. No marks on the body. Only one rather glaring thing was overlooked. The shell case. And that, I see now, was on purpose."

I pushed myself to my feet. The S&W gleamed darkly in the bright lights of the room. "Very entertaining," I said. "A very good piece of fiction. Unfortunately, it won't do you any good."

He glanced at the gun, but no fear showed on his face. "Ah. The gun. Let me see if I can tell what you plan to do next."

"Be my guest," I said. My heart was hammering, but the gun in my hand was rock-steady.

"The election is tomorrow. You're planning to shoot me. That's a thirty-eight you've got there. Probably borrowed from a cop, with witnesses to back up the transaction.

"You plan to shoot me as I sit here: In the interval before anyone arrives you'll jerk the desk drawer out to make it look like I went for a gun. By the way — I assume you have your old war souvenir with you?"

"That's right," I said, taking

the short, ugly little Tokarev out of my other pocket. It had spent the days since the shooting nestled securely in my office safe.

"When they find you here with me dead, they'll draw the natural conclusions, helped along, of course, by your explanation."

"That's right, Harry. You were just too good a chance to pass up. A stranger in town. More than a little odd, reclusive. Merida was murdered right after you arrived. You'll be found with your hand on an unregistered gun that will match the case they found at the scene of the murder.

"You tried to get to it when I confronted you with my suspicions of you. I beat you to the draw. Self-defense...especially before a jury of men and women from my home town of Raymondsville."

"And a district attorneyship for the hero."

"Why not? There won't be any more murders in Raymondsville."

Spreckler looked at me for a long moment. "Baker, you're insane. But you're right. There won't be."

I raised the .38.

"Because you overlooked something, Jim."

Bluff, I said to myself. *Oh, he's a smart customer.* I clicked the hammer back.

"Come around here, Jim."

Suspicious, I paused. No, he had to be bluffing.

He put out his arms slowly and pushed his chair away from the

scarred wooden writing desk that he had been behind every time I had seen him.

"Take a good look, Jim," he said, pointing down to the wheelchair. To the blanket-covered stumps where his legs once had been.

"There'd be some questions, wouldn't there? Such as, how did this guy — who needs a specially built car to get around — drag a hundred and thirty pound woman a quarter of a mile through heavy brush and scrub, without leaving a trail?"

I stared, speechless.

"You overcomplicated it, Jim," he said softly, as if he felt sorry for me. "You could have left it as it was, without a suspect, and you might have been elected. But you had to carry it too far. You had to make the plot so complicated that it broke down under its own weight. In short, Jim, if you shoot me, there will be some very awkward questions at the investigation. While, if you give yourself up, there's every chance of copping an insanity plea."

"I've got some money," I said.

"No, Jim. You can't even buy your way out. Not with me."

I set the revolver down on his desk, very slowly, feeling his eyes on me. "I hope this makes you a good story," I said bitterly, as he reached for the telephone.

He answered absently, as he waited for Lane to come on the line, "It will."

Corpse In The Alley



by HAROLD STRAUBING

Somebody fired the fatal shot.
The question was — who?

THE TELEPHONE RANG, and the sound bounced off the bare police walls. My partner, Detective Inspector William Mulraney, reached out for the phone, but kept his eyes on the cards spread on the desk before him. We were in the middle of a game of casino. The twenty-second this week. We were even now, and if my luck held out he'd owe me a quarter before our tour of duty was over tonight.

"Mulraney here." He talked close to the phone. "Yeah, yeah..." He took the cigar out of his mouth and held the chewed end against the cards, staining them. "We'll be right in."

"What is it this time?" I asked.

"A murder," he sighed, exhaling smoke. "Found a corpse in an

alley."

Mulraney was looking critically at his cards so I tossed him another question.

"Find anything else?"

He didn't look up but slowly moved his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "Three men and the murder weapon. A gun wiped clean and dumped in a garbage can. They think one of the three men is the killer."

Mulraney got up and tossed his cards on the desk, then scattered the remainder of the deck over them.

"Mixed deal," he announced.

"A frame!" I yelled. "Every time I'm ahead we get called."

"Yeah, yeah..." he grunted and led the way out. "Let's go."

He was my boss, so I went.

We marched into the line-up room. There were three men standing on the platform. The first one was a kid in his middle twenties. The bright lights made his red hair look like a sunset. His freckled face looked like it was used to laughing a lot, but now it had hard lines carved deep across his forehead and down the sides of his lean face.

I had seen lines like that on youngsters before. In pictures in the newspapers when they showed the kids on Vietnam duty. He wore a polo shirt and a pair of dirty slacks. He stared straight ahead but I knew he couldn't see us. Not with those bright lights shining into his eyes.

At his side stood a tall, muscular man. Much older, a few wisps of hair combed over the large bald head in an attempt to hide a shining pate. He still wore a large dirty apron which may have been white at one time. His pants were rolled up at the bottom and his shoes were large, heavy and warped. A stubble of beard greyed his face. His five o'clock shadow looked two days old.

The third man surprised me. The first thing I noticed about him were his dark glasses. Then I saw the red-tipped white cane he held in his right hand. A tin cup with some coins in it was attached to his torn jacket with an oversized safety pin. He held a dirty brown hat in his left hand that contained about a dozen pencils.

He was one of hundreds of beggars that walked the streets and the first time I had seen one in a line-up as a murder suspect. He had slightly greying hairs on a head where the hair was getting thin. His face was clean shaven and he stared, unseeing. He was accustomed to the dark and the harsh lights burning into his glasses cast no shadows on his brain. He seemed oblivious to his surroundings.

The Lieutenant thought one of these men was a killer! But which one?

I sneaked a look at Mulraney and could see he was just as puzzled as I was.

Mulraney ordered the lights out and invited the men off the platform and into our small office. I went first and cleaned up the cards, straightened the chairs in time to usher in the three men.

Mulraney waited until the men were seated. He lit his dead cigar, turned to the man wearing the dirty apron and said, "What's your name?"

"Herman Brower."

"Okay, Brower, what do you do for a living?"

"I run a bar on Collins Avenue and Fourteenth Street. I never been in trouble before." He rubbed his hands nervously on the apron and then, for the first time, noticed he was still wearing it.

"Go on," Mulraney encouraged him, a note of kindness creeping into his voice that could prove

very deceptive.

"I guess you want to know what happened tonight?"

Mulraney nodded. "It would help us a lot if we can get your side of the story."

Brower let out a quiet sigh. "Tonight I'm tendin' bar as usual, and as usual, it bein' Monday night, it's dead. There are only two customers and they're both standin' at the bar. The kid here," he jerked a thumb at the red-head, "and the guy who gets shot."

"This customer of yours that was shot," interrupted Mulraney, "was he well dressed, did he look as if he had money?"

"He looked it and he had it," the bartender was emphatic. "Every time he paid for a drink he took out a roll of bills and peeled one off. He did it after every drink."

"Was he standing near the kid?"

"Sort of. The kid was at about the center of the bar. The guy who was killed was at the end, near the window."

"Go on," Mulraney grumbled. "What happened next?"

"Let's see." The bartender squinted at the ceiling as if he expected to see the answer written there. "The guy pays for his last drink and walks out. The kid finishes his drink and walks out the side door."

"Which door did the murdered man use?"

"The front door. The one that leads out on the street."

The bartender waited expectantly and Mulraney allowed some annoyance to creep into his voice. "Go on — go on."

I could see that Mulraney didn't like to keep prodding, and Brower got the point. He began to talk more quickly.

"I heard a shot from the alley. Then I heard someone running. I ran out and caught this kid here."

That's where I broke in. "You sure you didn't go out the front door and shoot this guy," I interrupted. "When you heard the kid coming at you, you dumped the gun and ran. You caught the kid and held him as the fall guy."

"No! No!" His voice was excited now. "It's like I said. There's a shot. I run out into the alley and there's this kid. I hold onto him until the cops come. There's this blind gent at the end of the alley. He'll tell ya I'm tellin' the truth. He was in the street at the end of the alley." He wiped his hands nervously on his apron.

Mulraney turned towards the blind man. "Let's hear from our blind friend," he said thoughtfully. "Who are you and where do you fit in all this?"

"My name is Roland Tracey," the blind man said, "and there is very little that I can tell you. I was on my way home when I heard a shot. Before I knew what happened the police were in the neighborhood and I was brought

here as a material witness. But believe me sir, I witnessed nothing."

"Have you any idea where you were when the shot was fired?" Mulraney asked.

"I imagine I was quite close to the alley that runs along the saloon on Collins Avenue."

"What do you think happened?"

"It's hard to say. I would guess that someone was shot in the alley. When I approached the alley, whoever it was was frightened enough to run away. Perhaps the tapping of my cane scared him — perhaps I was seen. I really couldn't say."

"Did anyone pass you?" Mulraney asked.

"No. I'm quite certain no one ran out of the alley past me. I would have heard or felt someone passing me."

"Do you mind a few personal questions, Mr. Tracey?"

The blind man shook his head. "Don't mind at all," he answered. "Ask away."

"Good." Mulraney dropped a large ash onto the floor as his cigar completely missed the ashtray. "You pass the bar every night on your way home?"

"Yes."

"You live in the neighborhood long?"

"About four years."

"How long have you been blind?"

"Six years. An accident in a

machine shop. I haven't worked since."

"When did you start selling pencils?"

"About five years ago, when my money ran out. The compensation is small. I got myself a tin cup, I think that's standard equipment. The cane I got when I left the hospital. The pencils I pick up as I need them. Does that answer your question?" he asked bitterly.

I was getting a little warm under the collar. Mulraney was questioning him too closely. I looked at the tin cup, pencils and the red-tipped white cane and wished he'd get on to the kid.

Maybe there's something to this mental telepathy. Mulraney hesitated for a moment as if he had another question, then turned to the kid.

He pointed the dead cigar, chewed end to the kid and said, "What's your story?"

"I guess you know my name," the kid said, pointing to a card that Mulraney was staring at absent mindedly. "I'm Joe Baker." The kid ran a dirty hand through his shock of red hair. "You might find my story hard to believe..."

"Go ahead," Mulraney told him, a slight edge to his voice. "If it's true, I'll believe it."

"I had a couple of drinks, like he said," Baker nodded in the direction of the bartender. "I went out the side door because it's a short cut to Fourteenth Street and that's where I live. I

almost got to the street when I heard a shot. I fell to the ground and turned around. I crawled back and then I got up and ran."

"Why'd you do that?" Mulraney asked.

The kid was embarrassed. "Ever since I left the army, loud noises, especially gun shots..."

"Okay, kid," Mulraney was almost sympathetic, "what happened next?"

"I ran all the way down the alley and found it was a dead end, so I turned and came back." The kid pointed to the bartender. "Then he grabbed me."

"What were you doing all that time?" I shouted at the bartender.

He squirmed in his chair. "First, I thought it was backfire from a truck, and then I heard someone hightailing it down the alley. That's when I ran out."

"You're lying," I snarled at the bartender. "You're trying to make the kid the fall guy."

Mulraney tapped me on the shoulder. "You've got the wrong guy," he said quietly. "It's Ronald Tracey we want. He's the killer."

Tracey jumped off his chair, pencils and coins flying as he dashed through the door.

"You can't frame me!" he shouted. "I didn't do it!"

A thud from the next room caused Mulraney to cluck, "Ryan... he's a good boy. Nobody ever gets by him."

Mulraney dealt the cards and

nothing in my hand remotely resembled the cards spread on the table. The cigar stub danced from one corner of Mulraney's mouth to the other.

"Your move," he said.

I tossed a nine on the desk. "Okay, okay, mastermind," I said. "How'd you know Tracey wasn't blind?"

"His cane tipped me off," Mulraney said without lifting his eyes from his cards. "It was red and white. Spotlessly white. A blind man uses his cane to feel his way, but Tracey's cane didn't have a scratch on it. It was clean because he could see where he was going."

Mulraney tossed an ace on my nine, but I hardly noticed. "Tracey saw the customer flash a roll of bills through the window and shot him when he came out. But Tracey, scared by the kid in the alley, hid the money and then tried to bluff it though when the police caught up with him minutes later."

"It's simple once you know that Tracey can see." I tossed out a card. "But you must have known he was the killer the minute he came in. Why'd you waste all that time asking all those questions?"

"You're right," agreed Mulraney. "But we're cops and every suspected citizen is entitled to an investigation."

He reached out and took in the nine and ace with the good ten, and I paid him a quarter.

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For Old Times Sake

by J.M. REASONER

When Pete Nunley got in a jam with his boss
whom else could he turn to but Barney?

"GOD, I'M GLAD you're here!"
Pete said, nearly pulling me into
his apartment.

"I got here as soon as I could
after you called," I told him.
"What's wrong?"

He stalked across the room,

throwing his hands wide. "wrong?
Everything's wrong!"

I put a hand on his arm and said
quietly, firmly, "Settle down,
Pete. Tell me what's wrong and
maybe I can do something about
it."

He sat down on the sofa and tried to light a cigaret. It took him five tries to hit the end of it with his lighter.

"I'm in bad trouble, Barney. I don't know how to get out of it. When Bonelli finds out what I've done, he'll send someone after me."

"What could you have done to Bonelli that's that bad?"

Knowing Peter, I was already sure of what had happened, but I wanted to hear how he told it.

"I — I held out on him. Just a little at first. Collections were so good that he never noticed, not then."

"What did you do with it?"

"I knew a guy — a stock-broker — he invested it for me."

"And you wound up taking a bath, right?"

"Yeah. You know how it is. I had to replace it somehow. I lifted more; I figured if I could make a killing everything would work out all right."

I had to shake my head in wonder at him. "Lord, Peter, the stock market! Not horses, no dice, not even cards. You should have known better than to gamble on something like the stock market."

The face he turned to me was pathetic. "You don't understand, Barney. I wanted to, you know, go legit. I'm tired of running numbers for Bonelli."

"And now you're in the hole. How much?"

"Twelve grand."

"You don't go for half measures, do you? Why did you call me, Pete?"

"You're my best friend, Barney. I've known you longer than I've known anybody. You've worked with Bonelli before, I thought maybe you could tell me what to do."

"You thought maybe I'd give you the twelve grand."

He started to protest, unconvincingly, that he had no such thing in mind, but I wasn't paying much attention. I was remembering the first time I had met Pete Nunley.

I was sixteen years old and big for my age, big enough to play a little third base for the semipro team in the dusty West Texas town where I grew up. That afternoon, I was on my way home after a game, bat and glove over my shoulder and two crumpled, filthy five dollar bills in my pocket that were my share of the gate. I had gone three-for-four and felt good.

I was cutting through an alley on the edge of downtown when I heard shouting behind me and the sound of running feet. I turned and saw a short, thin kid doing his best to get away from half a dozen or so bigger kids. They all looked to be about two years younger than I was.

The kid being chased was running with his head down and his arms pumping, running for his life. I moved to the side of the alley to let the chase go past me, but

about that time the kid tripped on an empty tin can and hit the ground hard, rolling over twice before he stopped. The other kids were on him in a flash, all fists and feet.

I let it go on for a few seconds, then yelled, "*Hold it! Let him alone!*"

They didn't pay any attention to me, so I put my bat and glove down carefully, grabbed a couple of collars, and heaved two of them across the alley to hit hard against a building. The others stopped beating on the kid and turned toward me. I picked up the bat.

"What's the gripe?" I asked.

The biggest of the bunch looked me over, eyeing the baseball bat, shifted his feet, spat on the street, and said, "He stole my bike."

The kid sat up, his clothes ripped and tear streaks down his face. I asked him, "Did you steal the bike?"

"I—I just borrowed it."

The one who had accused him cursed and said, "Borrowed, hell! He's nothin' but a little thief!"

"And it took all six of you to get the bike back?"

"We was teachin' him a lesson."

"Okay, maybe he learned it already. Now beat it."

He took a step toward me. "Who asked *you* to but into this, anyway?"

I let the bat smack gently into the palm of my free hand. "I

invited myself. Okay?"

I wasn't afraid of them, even in a group, but there were six of them and I wasn't *that* much bigger. They hesitated, and before they could start fanning out around me, I pulled the two fives from my pocket and made sure they saw what they were. Then I wadded the bills into a ball and threw it back up the alley. Their eyes couldn't help but follow.

"*There!*" I said, "go get a wino and make him buy you some beer. And leave this kid alone. I'll handle him."

They glared at me some more, especially the one who had had his bike stolen, but they moved off down the alley and picked up the money. A minute later, they were nowhere to be seen.

I put out a hand to the kid. He looked suspicious, like he was afraid I was going to hit him, too, but he took my hand and let me help him up.

"Thank you," he said in a voice so soft that I could hardly hear him.

"What's your name, kid?"

"Peter Nunley."

"Look, Pete, you got to remember one thing. If you have to steal, steal from somebody who can't do anything about it."

I figured I would send him on his way with that piece of advice and that would be the end of it, but it didn't work out that way. I guess I kind of adopted him, or maybe he adopted me. Whatever, we wound

up spending a lot of time together. He didn't like his parents much, and they didn't like him either, so I let him hang around with me.

We had good times. We would cruise up and down the main drag in my '48 Chevy, listening to Buddy Holly and the Crickets and Elvis and Chuck Berry, and trying to pick up girls. Pete came to all the ball games that he could, too.

I could always count on hearing him cheer the loudest when I would go into the hole and spear a hot grounder and then throw off-balance without mustard on the ball but it usually got there in time, or when I would guess right on a pitch and hit a frozen rope off the left field fence and go sliding into second, challenging the outfielder's arm.

Eventually I got noticed and went to Florida at the invitation of a major league scout. Peter had to stay behind, and he didn't like that at all. I never made the big club, or even the minors, and I didn't have enough money to go home, so I bounced around every semipro league on the East Coast. It wasn't much of a living, but it was all I had.

It was just through sheer luck that I met Frank Bonelli and wound up doing odd jobs, usually violent ones, for him. Some of the things I had to do bothered me for a while, but I got over that. It was a job that paid well.

Then one day Peter Nunley showed up on my doorstep, having

shaken the dust off his feet and left Texas far behind. Naturally, he didn't have a job, but he knew that I "had connections", as he put it.

There was nothing I could do but ask Bonelli if he could put Pete to work. He did, even going so far as to give Pete his own numbers route, but that was a lot of years ago, and Pete was still where he had started out.

"I guess I can't blame you for being frustrated," I told him now, "but you shouldn't have gotten caught."

"I thought it would work out different," he said, shaking his head. "I wanted to be somebody important, like my friend Barney."

I laughed. "You sure set your sights high, don't you, kid? Don't you know I'm small time?"

"That's not true, Barney. You're bigger than Bonelli, lots bigger, even if you did start out working for him. you're one of the biggest men in the city."

"Which isn't saying a lot."

Pete was right in implying that I had made quite a bit of progress, though. It had been a long time since I handled a muscle job, and some of the Organization's best deals had come out of things that I had planned. Policy was my job now.

But that hadn't always been so.

I remembered a night not long after Pete had come to the city, while we were still sharing an

apartment. I came in early one morning after a particularly bad night and barely made it to the kitchen. I turned the water on in the sink and stuck my head under the cold stream. That made me feel a little better, but not much.

The noise I made coming in must've waked Pete up, because he came into the kitchen and turned the light on. I heard him gasp, and I snapped at him, "Turn it off!" The brightness hurt my eyes.

He turned the light off. "Barney, what happened?" he whispered in the darkness.

"I ran into some guys who thought I was in the wrong line of work."

"The bunch from the East Side?"

"Yeah. They thought they should be running things instead of Bonelli. I told 'em different."

"They could have killed you!"

"Not easily."

I heard the scrape of a chair as Pete sat down. There was fear and confusion in his voice when he spoke. "My God, Barney, what are we doing in this business? Why don't we just go home?"

I didn't feel like arguing with him. My head hurt too much and I had lost some teeth. I just said, "This is all I'm good for, kid."

"But it's dangerous!"

"That goes with the job."

Pete had never understood that, never understood the dangers that went with the job. It wouldn't have

made any difference, though. Everything in the world has its own little set of dangers attached to it, and Pete was always the type never to see them until it was too late.

"You can help me, Barney," he was saying now. "You can go to Bonelli, explain to him. I'll pay it all back."

"Okay, I'll go see Bonelli as soon as I leave here."

He beamed at me. "Thanks, Barney. You don't know how much it means to me to have a friend like you. It seems like you've always been there to take care of me. I was really worried about what would happen when Bonelli found out..."

"Bonelli knows."

"What?"

"He called me and told me, just before you did. He asked me if I would take care of it. For old times' sake."

Pete didn't want to understand. "Barney, what do you mean? You can fix it, can't you?"

I slipped the gun out of my pocket. You never forget how the grip feels in the palm of your hand, or the way your finger curls around the trigger, or the way it kicks against your hand when you squeeze a shot off. I was thinking about stolen bikes and bloody dawns and those long line drives and Pete cheering as I shot him, surprise flooding his face.

Memories just won't leave you alone.

Heir Apparent

by JEAN DARLING

Young Lord Richard had already killed to make Castle Killbawn his. But his troubles had only just begun.

A WREATH OF BLACK tied white roses hung on the great door of Castle Killbawn. Lady Cannon-Corr, herself, was dead at seventy-six. Centered on the refectory table in the darkened dining hall, she lay in state with her hands crossed over a single lily.

"It's a shame you're in no condition to enjoy one of these, Aunt Maud," Richard said through a mouthful of sandwich. "Ham, chicken and tomato cut thin, just the way you like them."

He grinned, recalling how shocked London-born Crompton had been when he insisted that the butler serve sandwiches and lager on Her Ladyship's bier!

"Good God, man! This is Ireland, you know, where people drink, eat, drink *and* drink at a wake," Richard reminded him, adding, "And it's not my fault if the old girl envisioned herself the ideal centerpiece complete with lily."

Richard almost split his sides when he first saw the waxen flower, which reminded him of the

oil-colored photograph upstairs on his Aunt's vanity table. The one that showed the young Maud, wrapped in a Spanish shawl from armpit to ankle, leaning on a plinth admiring a similar flower.

He took a long drink of beer, marveling at how much death had improved his aunt's face, lit now by tongues of amber flickering from a brace of floor-length candelabra. The fragile light smoothed away lines of struggle and pain alike, the cheeks looked silken, the lips full and soft. In this light Richard could well believe that she once had been *the* Maude Dearie, darling of London's West End, from whose slipper only the finest champagne was sipped.

It was during a stint in one of C.B. Cochran's Revues as one of his Young Ladies that Maud Dearie had bagged Lord Cannon-Corr as her "protector." Several years later, after his wife died, Lord Harry wed his Maud and carried her across the Irish Sea to his castle in the County Kildare. The only blot on his bride's

horizon was Michael, her stepson, less than eight years her junior, who disliked the pretty actress on sight.

After twenty-seven years the alliance came to an abrupt end when Lord Harry succumbed to a heart attack suffered in the quarters of the buxom upstairs maid. His son, Michael, succeeded to the title but Maud kept hold of the family fortune. Despite the rift in their marital relations, Lord Harry preferred his wife's shrewd mind and tight fist to his son's spendthrift ways.

Left with only a thousand pounds a year, Michael moved himself and his equally indolent son, Patrick, away from the bright lights of Dublin into the west wing of Castle Killbawn. The only joy in the situation, as far as Maud was concerned was that her stepson's wife, eschewing life in a country castle, had taken off for parts unknown.

Richard spit on his fingers and wiped a trace of mustard from his Aunt's chiffon sleeve. "You know, don't you, Old Girl, that if you hadn't shuffled off when you did, you were next on the agenda." He adjusted the folds of grey. "It wasn't that I wanted to, it was just Dice Deacon was cracking down on me and you know Dice Deacon when people can't pay their debts."

He shuddered, "Anyway, I'm awfully glad you went on your own."

Richard thought of the Casino just off Park Lane where the tall American whose tongue was sweet Southern flattery held court nightly. He thought of the little cubes of chance that had racked up so many IOUs until, at last, Deacon had cracked down. When Dice Deacon cracked down it was pay up or be taught a lesson, if being booted with cement and dropped in the Thames could be considered an educational experience for the gambler so shod.

In the beginning, when the amounts were small, Aunt Maud had come to the rescue, but when the sums rocketed, the well ran dry. "Not another penny!" she had said, moving her wheelchair back and forth in the way that so annoyed him.

"But what's the difference, Auntie, now or when you die?"

"What makes you think you'll get a penny then? Your father was all but cut off and Harry only kept you because he didn't want his brother's son put in an orphanage." She rolled the chair over to the piano.

"You know I'm only caretaker and when I die the estate passes on to Michael and his heirs. If I can leave you anything, Dickie, it won't be much." Idly, her arthritic hands clambered over the keyboard. "I sang this in the last revue I did for Cocky."

Maud Dearie sang a phrase or two in a wavering soprano before

she interrupted herself. "Oh, I wish you could have seen me, Dickie. I was beautiful then — and young, so young. I wore a picture hat piled high with violets."

But Richard wasn't listening. He was looking beyond the old woman, past the rose garden to the tennis court. There, playing doubles with two pretty young things, were the inheritors, Michael and Patrick, so secure without Dice Deacon and his bag of cement hanging over their heads. All Richard needed was twenty-five thousand pounds by the end of the month. It was now the seventeenth.

"That'll be the end then," he said, thinking out loud.

"End?" Maud asked, "God, what a noise, my hands just won't —" She closed the piano. "Yet it sounds just the same as it used to — in here." She touched her breast.

"The end of me, Auntie," he said. "When you're gone, those two out there won't even give me room in the cat's home — providing I'm still alive, that is."

"Yes, I know, and it's not fair," the old woman said. "It just makes me sick to think of dying when those creatures will inherit all this."

"Michael, then Patrick — and then?" Richard's eyes locked with Maud's, an idea forming at the back of his mind.

"You, Dickie, if no other male heirs are born." She laughed. "It

would be poetic justice if you, the despised orphan-nephew-cousin, inherited the title. You, Dickie, the son of the son of the brother who stole the only girl Harry ever really loved, according to him." Her voice fell to a whisper, "Oh, Dickie, if only — if ..."

"If ..." Richard echoed softly.

That same evening Richard invested in a bottle of Irish and invited himself into Patrick's room for a nightcap. As one bottle is much like another, regardless of who buys it, Patrick supplied glasses and went to work on the whiskey. An hour later, having drunk sparingly, Richard tucked a half a dozen sleeping pills into his cousin's mouth before tucking the almost insensible young man into bed.

Nobody was particularly surprised by Patrick's death. He had been warned against mixing alcohol and sleeping pills by any number of people as well as by the doctor who had saved his life when the boy had been discovered unconscious from a like mixture a few months before. It was open and shut — death by Misadventure.

Then, as so often happens, tragedy struck the family for a second time. Lord Michael's brakes, adjusted during the night by Richard, failed on a downhill run out of the Wicklow Mountains. He was returning from his son's funeral with the two pretty young things in the car. By the time help

came it was too late. The car had exploded into a raging inferno. And so Richard slipped with ease into the role of Lord Cannon-Corr.

As soon as was possible, Richard took his title over to London, where, after a lengthy bout of bargaining, Dice Deacon agreed to return the IOUs. All he wanted in exchange was the estate as left by Lady Cannon-Corr, lock stock and barrel, which, to Richard, seemed cheap at twice the price. He had bought back his life as well as his credit, if he wished to join Dice's table that night.

How lovingly the American's tongue rested on the title with which Richard now prefaced his name. But after the contract restoring the rest of his three score years and ten was signed, Richard caught a Dublin flight away from temptation. Three months later Richard was free, clear and out of debt. Aunt Maud died peacefully in her sleep.

Crompton knocked softly before opening the dining hall door to announce that Liam O'Brien, the solicitor, was waiting to read the will. Richard took a final gulp of beer and scrambled around the table and along the wide hall to the music room.

Mr. O'Brien sat behind a small table with the will open before him, an envelope by his right hand, a small brass-bound leather chest by his left. Richard took his place in a chair directly in front

of O'Brien. The staff stood to one side.

Each of the three maids received two hundred pounds, the cook three and Crompton, the butler-chauffeur, five. There were several more small bequests to the gardner and various tradespeople in the town, everything else came to Richard.

When at last O'Brien removed his reading glasses, Richard was given the envelope. It was addressed to him in Aunt Maud's spidery hand. Opening it, he took out the letter and read:

Dear Dickie,

You and I have always understood each other and you know I did my best for you. At least you have the title and that always helps — in certain circles. Sorry there wasn't more.

*My love to you always,
Aunt Maud*

"Do you know what my aunt means?" Richard asked O'Brien.

The man, small and pompous, handed the brass-bound chest to Richard. A moment later the lid was open to show a welter of documents. Richard closed the box. It would be just a waste of time checking over what he wasn't going to be able to enjoy anyway. Might as well hand it intact to Dice Deacon and get it over with.

"You didn't answer my question," he said to Liam O'Brien.

"If you examine the contents of the chest, the meaning of Lady Cannon-Corr's letter will become obvious."

Richard looked at the man for a moment wondering why solicitors always had to be so stuffily know-it-all. Probably five words or less could answer the question, but no, he had to do it the hard way. Then Richard began to read the contents of the chest, paper by paper.

"But these are all bills of sale, receipts, I don't ..." Richard looked up.

"It's obvious enough. Lady Cannon-Corr was in financial difficulties and during the last years of her life she was forced to sell everything bit by bit with the proviso that each piece sold would remain in the castle until after her death. Now, of course, the owners can collect their property at their convenience."

"But the bequests? There must be *something* left." Richard felt panic rising.

"A trust fund set aside for the servants."

"You said sold, what exactly do you mean?"

"Exactly that. The chest there contains the answer to any question you might pose."

"You mean *this* is sold — and *this* — and *this* and *this*?" Richard ran around the room, touching first one piece of furniture, then another, a painting here, a candlestick there.

"Yes, they're all sold as well as

the castle and grounds." O'Brien paused to puff a cigar alight. "Everything is sold."

"But why did she sit here at the piano that day and say it all could be mine?" Richard stood in the same place he had stood on the day his aunt had made her tacit suggestion. Or had she? *You did*, Aunt Maud, *You did*, Richard thought, recalling the note. He looked past the rose garden at the empty tennis court. Overhead a small plane darting in and out of the gathering clouds while below, in the distance, vans began turning into the castle drive.

"I'd say those are the vultures coming to strip Castle Killbawn." He glanced at O'Brien. "But the table, what are they going to do, throw the old girl on the floor?"

"The dining hall will remain untouched until after the funeral." O'Brien was shrugging into his coat, a sly smile dimpling the corners of his mouth. "I'll be off now," he said, but Richard wasn't listening. Behind the parade of moving vans a Silver Shadow Rolls Royce drew to a halt, the door opened and Dice Deacon stepped out, looking hale and hearty after the long drive and the ferry ride from Liverpool.

Cold sweat broke out on the back of Richard's neck. *God, let him kill me before sinking me in the Thames*, Richard prayed. Worse than anything in the world, Lord Richard hated the cold, especially cold water.



The Blue Trail

by MIKE TAYLOR

The house party was marooned in a billionaire's Alpine schloss. The only prospect that did not please was knowledge that a murderer was in their midst.

MID-AFTERNOON. A non-stop party was in progress at Schloss Valhalla. In the low-ceilinged rathskeller — formerly a part of the dungeons, I'd been told — couples gyrated to the sounds of four long-haired youngsters in green lederhosen and vests. Their music alternated between disco and the tradi-

tional Austrian waltzes. *Boogie, boogie, oomph-pah-pah...*

Axel Lundholm's renovated castle high in the Vorarlberg wasn't exactly Norse heaven, but it qualified as a jet-setter's dream. Over thirty rooms, half a dozen roaring fireplaces, a 24-hour bar, a private lift and two excellent trails, a good mix of beautiful men

and women, even a two-day-old snow-storm howling around outside — the whole schmier.

It was also a security man's nightmare. Fifty-some people, most of them unknown quantities, thrown together in a snowbound mountain lodge can create problems even if none originally existed.

I was there, not liking it, because the man I work for was mixing business with pleasures. Orin Trelow is a senior director for NORAMCO, one of the larger multinational corporations, and he rates skiing only slightly less important than breathing.

When they weren't on the slopes, he and Lundholm were huddled with a couple of Middle-Eastern ministerial types, hammering out some deal that would probably determine what a gallon of gas will cost you next summer. His so-called holidays are when I work the hardest.

"Axel, may I present Michael Grim, my chief of security. Mike, our host."

I slid off the barstool, from which I'd been admiring skis, sipping a scotch and worrying. The Norwegian industrialist's handshake was calloused and powerful.

"Mr. Lundholm."

They were a contrast. The boss is six-feet-two, whippet-thin and silver-haired. Lundholm was considerably shorter and heavier.

Strands of pale red hair struggled to cover a monumental bald spot. The only similarity lay in the eyes — a calm, no-nonsense grey in both cases.

"You have become somewhat of a celebrity of late, Mr. Grim. The article in *Le Match* this past month, wasn't it? Your 'International Security Service' is benefiting from the publicity, I imagine."

"Unfortunately we fill a need," I said.

"Indeed. Terrorism is a spectre which stalks every man of wealth or political influence these days. Particularly here in Europe. It is true that you are a former agent of the American Secret Service?"

I said I'd spent seven years protecting presidents. "Honing my skills" they had called it in the article. I wondered what he was leading up to. We'd been there three days and he hadn't expressed my interest in the hired help before.

"Axel has come up with a little problem you might be able to help with," the boss said.

Lundholm pulled a yellow sheet from inside his jacket and handed it to me. "This came over the Telex from my Bergen offices a few minutes ago. It is a transcription of a telephone call they received early this morning."

I opened it and read:

THE CAPITALIST PIG LUNDHOLM WILL NOT LEAVE VALHALLA ALIVE. LET HIS

DEATH SERVE AS A WARNING TO ALL EXPLOITERS OF THE POOR AND REPRESENTED NATIONS. WE, THE SOLDIERS OF THE THIRD WORLD LIBERATION FRONT, PLEDGE THAT HIS BLOOD SHALL SYMBOLIZE THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA.

I refolded it. "Could be a crank call. It's unusual for these groups to advertise their presence before they strike."

"Who can say? I have received such threats before and dismissed them. But this trip was made with no publicity; that these people know where I am concerns me."

"Can you vouch for your guests?"

He laughed sourly. "Mr. Grim, I cannot even *account* for all of them. I know perhaps twenty well. The rest are wives, husbands, lovers, friends invited by other friends — the usual hangers-on a man in my position must endure. And the staff."

I decided I didn't care much for his arrogance. He was condescending and wore an expression of permanent distaste, as if he felt the rest of humanity might be a rung down on the evolutionary ladder. But I don't get paid to like people.

"Can we expand the scope of my coverage to include Axel?" Orion Trelow asked.

"There will be plenty of gaps

with only three men plus myself," I told him. "Unless the two of you want to hold hands the rest of the week. But our procedures are pretty well established. I can keep my eyes and ears open. And my men will include Mr. Lundholm in their surveillance whenever possible."

"Then that will have to suffice," Lundholm said. "Your assistance is appreciated, Mr. Grim. Rest assured, there will be a bonus for the additional workload. If it were possible I would have more personnel brought in. Regretably, the weather prohibits that."

The storm had already dumped over a foot of new snow. Valhalla was effectively cut off from the outside world until the big plows from below managed to reopen the roads.

Later that evening. Most of the people had gravitated to a huge room that must once have been the castle's main hall. Stone fireplaces roared at opposite ends of the place. The band had taken a break and been replaced by Muzak symphonies.

Two local bartenders were red-faced and sweating, doing yeoman labor to keep up with the crowd's thirst. Half a dozen strategically placed fondues bubbled cheerily. Wine and merriment hung like a fog in the warm air.

"Isn't it *thrilling*?" said Ingrid Thysinger, in a mincing falsetto that indicated she didn't find it

that way at all. A tall Nordic girl with a wealth of silver-blond hair, she had parked herself on the arm of the overstuffed chair I was occupying.

Profiled in the firelight her face had the classic lines of another Ekberg, but her figure was willowy and athletic. She had won a bronze medal in the slalom at the '68 Winter Olympics and was now, she told me, a professional ski instructor. I'd let her work on my rusty form that morning on the upper slopes and we'd had a couple of laughs.

"It's quite a collection," I said. "All the beautiful people."

"They weary me," she murmured in her normal voice, sipping at a glass of rose. "All so self-important, chattering and smiling and touching like a roomful of windup dolls. Everyone who is anyone. Which reminds me, you haven't told me who you are, to be invited into the exclusive circle."

"Just one of the worker bees. I do consultant work for Orin Trelow." Although my men are fairly conspicuous in the conduct of their jobs, I try to maintain a low profile.

"I don't believe it," she declared without offense. "I know some of these corporation types. They are careful, frightened men who do everything in groups. They drink too much and talk too loud. You are quiet, a man alone, sometimes dangerous appearing. I wonder if you are a spy."

I grinned. "007 at your service, ma'am." It seemed to me she was probing a little. I tried to remember who she was here with, but couldn't attach any particular face or name to her.

We were interrupted by a slight, dark-haired youth, obviously deep in his cups. Someone had pointed him out to me earlier as Sidney Grimes, the lead singer for one of the hotter British rock groups on the Continent.

He leered at Ingrid, scowled at me and said, "What a drag, darlings. No pot, no dust. This booze is giving me a terrible headache. Look at them." He swung an arm that took in the entire room. "Old man Lundholm's gallery of fools. Owns 'em all, he does. Every one waiting for a dispensation from him. Well, I wish 'em luck. Better than I've had."

Ingrid said, "Sid, you're drunk."

"Roger that. Drunk as a lord. Some fellows drink to forget. Not me. I drink to remember. Remember how I sold our future to that money-grubbing old sod. Long as he holds our contract, we're a second-rate group stuck playing the cafe-gasthaus circuit. Uses us as a tax write-off without a care for the talent wasted."

He favored us with a few choice descriptions of Axel Lundholm's supposed ancestry.

My ears pricked up. Definitely a man with a grudge. An

earlier thought surfaced. Terrorists don't often reveal their intentions before they act.

"Oh, come off it, Sidney," a new voice interjected in clipped old-British tones. "It was a business deal pure and simple. If it wasn't for Axel's backing, you'd still be playing Saturday night gigs in Liverpool pubs."

This came from a tall, wide-shouldered man, an early-forties Errol Flynn type complete to the chin mustache. I recognized him as Archer Chase, Lundholm's second-in-command. A ladies' man, I'd heard, and he looked the part.

Sidney's reply was another stream of profanity.

Chase gave me a raised eyebrow. "I'm sure this young lady doesn't care to hear such appalling language. I suggest you remove yourself from the premises."

I hadn't known anyone talked like that anymore.

Young Grimes made the mistake of taking a swing at the big Englishman. Chase caught the poorly-thrown blow on his arm, reversed the flow without spilling his drink, and brought Sidney's arm up hard between his shoulder blades.

He said, "Let's go, chum," and frog-marched him away.

"That lad had some harsh words for our host," I said.

Ingrid gave me a black look. "There are many people who do not care for Axel Lundholm's

methods," she said enigmatically and headed for the bar.

During the next few hours I talked to people at random, angling for responses to Axel Lundholm. I caught my limit in a hurry. It seemed a quick natural death was among the kinder fates wished upon our host by many of those who knew him. He was not Mr. Popularity. Few specifics, but the general drift was that he made money well and treated people badly.

Picking a would-be murderer, terrorist or otherwise, out of this bunch would be like spotting a phony in Hollywood. I hoped the call was a hoax. If anything did happen to him I had visions of a scene like *Murder on the Orient Express* where everybody did it.

I went to bed late, after checking with Bill Marston, my man on the grave shift. All was quiet, but I didn't sleep very well.

'Twas THE MORNING after. Noon, actually. I had a nagging hangover, the kind you get when you drink too little and think too much. I shared a late brunch with the boss in his suite and told him some of what had gone on the previous night.

"Lundholm's about as popular as diarrhea. The only one who supported him at all was Archer Chase."

"That's surprising. The word going around is that Chase is about to get the axe. He can hardly

be unaware of it. I should think he'd be among the bitterest of the bitter."

"The axe? What for?"

"Apparently he's used his position as a buyer to take control of a substantial part of Lundholm's shipping interests. It was all done very carefully and legally over the past few years — just recently came to light. Even Axel isn't certain just how powerful Chase is. He wants to ease him out quickly before he winds up with a minority in his own holdings."

I sighed. "What's one suspect, more or less? Sir, I can see three possibilities here. First, the call was a phony. Second, it was for real and one or more of this collection is a genuine terrorist. Or last, somebody wants to waste Lundholm and put the blame on the radicals. I'm beginning to like the latter more and more. He rubs half the people here the wrong way, including me."

"How much protection can you give him?"

"Not enough if somebody's determined to get to him. He's bullheaded, won't make any concessions to aid our security arrangements. The three possibilities I mentioned all concern Axel Lundholm — there's a fourth."

He said, "Yes?" through a mouthful of soft-scrambled egg.

"This could all be a diversion to get us away from you. That's another reason he won't get full coverage. I can't risk pulling my

people off you. You're the one who pays the bills."

"I'm comforted, Mike."

I finished the meal of sausages and German potato pancakes — which promptly became a small leaden ball in my stomach — and wandered downstairs, vaguely restless. Somewhere in my cluttered head, behind the row of grey filing cabinets called logic, a tiny alarm was pulsing.

A noisy group was gathered in front of a bulletin board by the door to the ski equipment room. I stopped to see what that was all about.

"The blue trail's closed," somebody told me. "If you're planning to ski down the mountain today, be certain you stay on the red run or follow the lift."

"Blue was the faster trail too," a woman declared.

There was a chorus of agreement. I heard enough references to heavy powder and the possibility of avalanches to convince me that only a fool would leave the safe upper slopes around the castle.

I went back upstairs, chatter with my day man, Jacques Bergett. Lundholm was still in his rooms. I moseyed down stairs again, searching half heartedly for Ingrid. I found her outside in the old courtyard waxing a pair of skis. It had stopped snowing. Rifts of blue opened occasionally in the low flying clouds. She glanced up

then bent her head in apparent concentration.

"Looks like the weather's improving," I said brightly.

"Ja," she agreed.

"I didn't see much of you last night after our singer friend disrupted things."

"Ja," she said.

Recognizing a dead-end conversation I got out of there.

Archer Chase was in the rathskeller, sipping reflectively at a stein of beer.

"You handled that little scene last night very smoothly," I said, pulling up a stool.

"Ahh, Mr. — Grim, isn't it? — Axel has told me about you. Do you really feel he may be the object of a terrorist group?"

"It's possible. It could also be a hoax. Or someone with a grudge. What about the boy? Does he dislike Lundholm enough to kill him?"

He shrugged. "I'm afraid poor Sidney doesn't — what is the expression? — have his head on straight all the time. Who can say what a person is capable of when he is under the influence of these substances so much in vogue today."

"I got the impression he was doing without last night," I said, "and not liking it. I guess that could make a guy behave erratically."

"Perhaps."

I decided to be blunt. "A lot of people besides young Grimes

don't care much for your boss. You're probably as close to him as anyone. Do you mind telling me your feelings?"

He paused a minute. "Axel Lundholm is a ruthless person, in the business sense. So am I, old man. We have worked well together. I don't hold much affection for him. Admiration, perhaps."

Cool and bland. Not a hint of concern over a possible imminent departure. Thanks for nothing, old man.

The sun came out later in the afternoon. It wasn't long after that when somebody suggested a moonlight ski party. The idea caught on rapidly. The allure of a clear night and fresh powder was apparently irresistible to the ski-nuts. Or maybe it was because a lot of people had started drinking again.

I vetoed participation by either Axel Lundholm or the boss and was quickly overruled. After all, it was pointed out, I hadn't found any concrete indications of danger. There was a large potential for trouble, I argued, trying to be diplomatic while telling Lundholm quite a few folks hated his guts. Nobody was impressed. I guess you don't get to be a multi-millionaire without taking risks.

I briefed my crew and made a hasty trek outside before dusk to look over the area. All the activity would be confined to the upper slopes — sort of a group encounter

on skis, I gathered.

It wasn't an outing to inspire confidence. There were stunted firs and rock formations everywhere — enough cover to ambush an infantry battalion. There was also a trail of footprints, half drifted in, that added a whole new twist to the situation.

When I got back I briefed Orin Trelow and Lundholm on what I'd found and what I suspected. There was no longer any doubt about a legitimate threat existing — the attempt would probably be made tonight. On whom by whom was the question.

They had two options — stay inside, safe, which would probably just postpone the stike. Or go out, with precautions, and bring things to a head.

It was decision time.

NINE P.M. ACCORDING to my Rolex digital. Half a hundred half-loaded maniacs were tearing up the slopes, skiing in all directions, some with torches, most without. It was chaos. Ski masks and hooded parkas made it impossible to identify anybody unless you were right on top of them.

The air was crisp and Alpine clear. A three-quarter moon hung over the shoulder of the mountain, striking diamonds off the new-fallen snow. Huddled clumps of evergreens made dark clots on the silvered landscape.

I was skiing five yards behind Axel Lundholm, slightly to his

left. Orin Trelow was a good distance away, the center of a triangle formation. The three corners were made up by my men. I had insisted these two remain apart; I didn't want to jeopardize either man's safety with the presence of the other. We had been out about forty-five minutes. The .44 Magnum was cold under my parka.

A large figure schussed up beside me. "Exhilarating, isn't it?" Archer Chase's voice came slightly muffled through the ski-mask. He'd stuck close to us since we left the castle.

And how, I thought. We were traversing the relatively gentle slopes below Schloss Valhalla, not moving very fast. It was a good quarter mile to the downhill runs. Lundholm was playing criss-cross with a buxom fraulein never meant for ski-pants. A peal of feminine laughter echoed in the vastness. I executed a stem Christi, feeling good about my form.

"Who's that?" Chase grunted.

Upslope, coming fast, was a dark figure crouched low over his skis, poles tucked. I cut sharply, nearly running into Chase, groping for the zipper on my parka.

"Lundholm!" I yelled. "Get down!"

He didn't hear me. The unidentified skier shot past us, heading straight for the Norwegian's back. Moonlight glinted on metal.

Two spurts of orange, two flat

cracks. Lundholm's arms flew out. He did a half somersault, skis crossing, and went down in a cloud of snow. The gunman veered past his victim, still going at a good clip.

I slewed clumsily to a halt, wrenching a knee. People were converging from all over the slope, making excited noises. The boss and his escorts wedged their way through the gathering crowd.

"Stay with them," I told Bill Marston. "There might be more than one. Have somebody call the authorities below. Tell them to pick up anyone coming down the mountain if they can get there."

I pushed off, favoring the right knee. The black-clad figure was a hundred yards away by now, skiing straight down-slope, beginning to pick up speed again. I worked the poles until my shoulders ached.

Somebody pulled alongside of me. I glanced over. It was Archer Chase. He was no Jean Pierre Killy either, struggling along in the old *landlaufing* style.

We swept around a black out-cropping or rock. The crest marking the start of the downhill runs was plainly visible, etched against the blackness beyond. We were gaining ground slightly — only because whoever we were pursuing wasn't much worried. He was coming up rapidly on the steep dropoff. The dark silhouettes of flags fluttered against the snow.

Just then the skier went down.

It was a classic eggbeater, a tangle of arms, legs and skis. A spray of silver-blond hair flashed in the moonlight.

As Ingrid fell, Chase, who had apparently been struggling to stay with me, accelerated alike an Olympic racer. He shot down the easy slope, propelling himself with long, driving sweeps of his poles.

I put everything I had into my skiing but I couldn't keep up. My goggles fogged; I pushed them up on my forehead. The wind brought tears streaming from my eyes. My knees began to feel like two rusty hinges.

The fall must have knocked the breath out of the girl. She still lay sprawled in the snow. I wasn't sure what Chase intended, but he didn't keep me in doubt for long. As he came up to her I saw his right arm go up, the sharp metal pole tip gleaming like a dagger.

I was probably ten yards away. I aimed directly for him, surged forward with all my strength and lowered a shoulder.

We hit like two opposing linemen in the last minute of a tied-up Superbowl. I got the worst of it when something hard clipped my chin.

By the time I managed to dig myself out, he was up and gone. I scrambled up just in time to see his head and shoulders drop below the crest of the plunging slope.

"Chase! I yelled hoarsely. "Come back! Stop!"

But he kept going, of course.

Ingrid was sitting up slowly, brushing the snow from her face. I yanked open her parka and appropriated a snub-nosed .38 from an inside pocket.

"He t-t-ried to *kill* me!" she cried weakly.

"Twice," I said. "You're a lucky girl."

She didn't understand.

"You were a tool, you dumb little anarchist. Chase set you up. Your people wanted to kill Axel Lundholm — God knows why. Chase showed you how — he helped get you up here. Didn't you ever think he might have reasons of his own? He even arranged a call to Lundholm's offices, warning him, to make sure everybody knew who to blame.

"Then all he had to do was make certain you weren't around to talk and he was home free. He hung close to me all evening — the perfect alibi. After you shot Lundholm, he came with me, just to make certain. When you fell, it ruined everything. He made one desperate attempt to kill you before you could talk, but I messed that up. He had to run then."

A group of people came skiing up. Ingrid's eyes widened. One of them was Axel Lundholm.

"But I *shot* him!" she protested.

"Armored shirt," I said. "All you did was knock the wind out of him."

She shook her head. "You're the lucky one, Michael Grim. I

could have shot this swine in the head."

"At night, from a pair of skis, going forty miles an hour down hill? No way. You had to aim for the broadest part of the target. How are you feeling, Mr. Lundholm?"

"Sore," he snapped. "And mad. You were right, Grim."

"About what might happen, yes. I just didn't know who or why."

"Was there another one?"

"Yeah. Archer Chase."

"Damn the man! He's gotten away then?"

"No," I said, "I don't think so. While I was out this afternoon I saw that somebody had been ahead of me. I followed the tracks down here." I looked at Ingrid. "I don't know what Chase had in mind originally, but this was his last-minute inspiration. He made sure you knew about the blue trail being closed, didn't he?"

Comprehension dawned. "He switched the starting flags," she said dismally.

"Right. And I switched them back, in case we couldn't catch whoever was being set up. He's on the wrong trail."

Minutes later, we all heard and felt the awesome rumble of the avalanche, as tons of loose earth and snow poured down the mountainside at express-train velocity, obliterating the blue trail forever.

I think Axel Lundholm smiled.

Sunday Morning Bandit

by C.J. LINDO

Bugs Bear once said the lowest man in the world is one who'll steal two left shoes. But a thief who'd heist a newsboy's papers has to be right down there with him.

MONDAY IS USUALLY my favorite day, but last week was a different story. I'm an independent newspaper routeman. I buy the paper direct from the presses for ten cents, sell it to the stores on my route for fifteen cents, and sell it for twenty.

It doesn't seem like much, but the nickels add up and I earn enough from 700 papers a day to cover my alimony payments, college tuition and rent, with a little bit left over for a cold beer now and then. The pay isn't bad for a 28 hour week, and I like being my own boss.

This Monday was running along smoothly. My pockets bulging with bills and change, I drove into the parking lot at the Johnson Grocery Store on Atlantic Ave. The local kids had been having a party there last night. The lot was a jungle of broken beer bottles and empty six pack cartons.

I crawled through the glassy minefield, hoping I wouldn't rip a tire to shreds. Pay out 35 dollars for a new tire and my profits for the day would be lost. I didn't even get a chance to drop a bundle of papers on the counter before Joe, the owner, hit me with the bad news.

"Where the hell were my Sunday papers," he yelled, screwing up his beefy face and raising his big hands over his head in a miniature version of King Kong's Empire State act.

"No Sunday papers and a parking lot full of glass two days in a row!"

Joe isn't usually a screamer. I guess the thought of sweeping all that glass in the parking lot on a Monday morning was tearing away at his ulcer. I tried to calm him down, but it was no use.

I knew I'd dropped off a tied bundle of twenty-five papers at

about two a.m. Sunday morning, and I was sure he knew it too. He wasn't listening to any explanations, and I can't say I blamed him. Twenty-five outraged Sunday customers had probably descended on him, screaming for their papers, and threatening to take their business elsewhere.

There is nothing like the indignation of a homeward-bound churchgoer looking forward to his Sunday paper, coffee and fresh rolls. No store owner could survive on what he makes on selling the paper. It's the traffic the papers pull in that keeps him in business. People may come in for the paper, but they walk out with bread, milk, soda, beer and all the other staples that keeps Joe's son in med school.

I gave Joe credit for the stolen papers and collected the rest of his bill, but the day was ruined for me. It wasn't just the couple of dollars that would come out of my pocket. If the kids having the party in Joe's parking lot had messed with the papers, they would have cut open the bundles and tossed them to the four winds.

In that case, there would have been a few scraps still flying around, but there weren't. From now on I would be wondering which one of my customers was stealing the papers I dropped off along the route in the Sunday morning darkness. It had to be someone with a big Sunday paper traffic.

For the rest of the morning, as I collected my money, I checked out each store for any signs that they might have sold more papers than usual, but I found nothing out of the ordinary. No one else had lost any papers to the Sunday Morning Bandit.

As the morning wore on, I became more and more determined to find out who had done it. As soon as I was finished, I made a bee line back to Joe's store. The only witnesses I knew to be out early Sunday morning had to be the kids having the beer party. There wasn't any glass around when I dropped off the papers at two a.m., and I'm sure the kids weren't around when Joe opened up at seven a.m.

There was a good chance that one of them might have spotted the paper bandit, but getting him to admit to being around might be a problem. They knew Joe would be looking to kick a few behinds, especially after he wore out a new broom sweeping up a case of broken beer bottles two days in a row.

Before I began banging on the neighborhood doors, I made a quick stop back at Joe's and snuck in to clean up in his back room. At 5' 6" and 165 pounds, with a wild nest of jet black hair, I sometimes look like a runaway barrel cactus. It's too late to do anything for the body, but beating down the wild bush on the top of my head helps

to put people at ease a little bit.

I hit the jackpot at the third neighbor I questioned. The crashing beer bottles had waked her up, and several of the kids had run past her window when the stabbing red light of a police car whipped across the parking lot, chasing them back into the darkness.

She even recognized one, but she made me promise not to say who told me. It was Eddie Dolan, and I could understand her reluctance to get involved. Eddie Dolan was a sadistic nineteen-year old who liked to be the center of attraction. He got attention by terrorizing the neighborhood with his idea of practical jokes. They were usually cruel, and most of the victims were unable to fight back.

I've always been careful to avoid any confrontation with him. Not that I'm afraid of him. One good kick and he'd be talking in a soprano voice for a week. It's just that any routeman, whether it's bread, papers or milk, can't afford to get into a vendetta with the local kids.

We're too vulnerable to an attack. We can't afford the time to take all the precautions against a continuing guerrilla war. We do the only thing we can do. We drop our loads and head for the next stop as quick as we can, and we don't get involved in local problems. We've got too many localities to cover.

It didn't look like I had too much

choice now. The only thing I could do was to jump on Eddie so hard that he wouldn't want to get close enough to me to think of revenge for a long time.

I spotted him sitting on a bench over by the railroad station, recovering from his early morning party. After the truck was parked, I strolled into the station and headed for the men's room. Inside, I found a booth with a good view of the door and hinges that didn't squeak. Sooner or later Eddie was going to make a little trip, and I intended to be at his journey's end.

It wasn't long before Eddie banged open the door and groaned his way over to the closest urinal. When I heard the splashing of Eddie's private waterfall, I made my move. He never saw the kick that moved his left kidney two inches closer to his stomach, and he wet the wall and floor as he went down hard on his face.

When he began to groan I gave him a few more kicks in the ribs until I heard a satisfying crack. Eddie wouldn't be laughing at any practical jokes for a while.

Squatting down, I grabbed his hair and gave his head a few thumps on the wet tile floor to get his attention.

"Why'd you smash all those beer bottles in the lot, Eddie?" I asked him, lowering my voice to a growl. "And why'd you steal my Sunday papers?"

"I didn't do it, Joe, really I

didn't," he whined.

At least my luck was changing, he thought I was Joe. I wouldn't have to worry about him trying to get even for a while. As long as he didn't realize who I was, I decided to give his head a few more thumps on the floor.

"Come on, Eddie, you were there Sunday morning. What did you do with those papers?"

"I didn't touch them. It was the drunk in the blue Chevy, the one with the fishing poles on the roof rack," he gasped, "We tried to stop him by heaving beer bottles at him. Honest, we did."

I didn't believe the part about the beer bottles, but Eddie was probably telling the truth about the papers.

I left Eddie lying on the Men's Room floor and headed back to my truck. Anyone finding him would think he was just another drunk kid who passed out from too much booze and not enough brains. I was puzzled. Why would an early morning fisherman steal a bundle of papers? One paper I could understand, but not twenty-five. I made a left on Merrick and headed for the fishing docks. If my luck still held, I figured I might find out what charter boat he went out on. If he went out on a private boat my chances of finding out anything were bad.

A half hour later I got the information I wanted from the mate of the Triton's Luck. He remembered the man. It was a VFW charter

from Valley Stream. The guy had staggered on board with his pole under one arm and my papers under the other. He told everyone that he brought the papers to "wrap up all the fish they were going to catch."

From what the mate said, he spent the day hanging over the rail being sick, not catching fish. All the mate knew was that his name was Bill, and he owned a one-man appliance repair business.

The rest of my detective work was easy. I've got an ex-cousin-in-law who belongs to the same VFW Post. One call to him, and I had all the information I needed on my Sunday Morning Bandit.

It would have been a waste of time trying to collect my paper money from him. He would deny taking them, and I had no witnesses, except for Eddie, who would deny he saw anything. I got my twenty-five papers worth, though. I phoned in a repair call to Bill's Appliance Repair for Joe Johnson's refrigerator. I gave him Joe's address and told him no one would be home, and to just walk in the unlocked back door. I didn't tell him about Joe's Doberman Pinscher. Joe told me once he never locked his back door because of the crazy dog he had. It seems that Randy never barked at people. In fact, he would let anyone walk right into Joe's house even if no one was home. He just wouldn't let anyone leave...

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